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VOL. 1382.

A PRINCESS OF THULE BY WILLIAM BLACK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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PRINCESS OF THULE.

BIBLIOTHECA REGIA MONACENSIS

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF HETH."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1874.

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A PRINCESS OF THULE.

CHAPTER I.

A Friend in Need.

Was it a delusion that had grown up in the girl's mind, and now held full possession of it—that she was in a world with which she had no sympathy, that she should never be able to find a home there, that the influences of it were gradually and surely stealing from her her husband's love and confidence? Or was this longing to get away from the people and the circumstances that surrounded her, but the unconscious promptings of an incipient jealousy? She did not question her own mind closely on these points. She only vaguely knew that she was miserable, and that she could not tell her husband of the weight that pressed on her heart.

Here, too, as they drove along to have tea with a certain Lady Leveret, who was one of Lavender's especial patrons, and to whom he had introduced Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter, Sheila felt that she was a stranger, an interloper, a "third wheel to the cart." She scarcely spoke a word. She looked at the sea; but she had almost grown to regard that great plain of smooth water as a melancholy and monotonous thing—not the bright and boisterous sea of her youth, with its winding channels, its secret bays and rocks,

its salt winds, and rushing waves. She was disappointed with the perpetual wall of white cliff, where she had expected to see something of the black and rugged shore of the north. She had as yet made no acquaintance with the sea-life of the place; she did not know where the curers lived, whether they gave the fishermen credit and cheated them, whether the people about here made any use of the back of the dog-fish, or could, in hard seasons, cook any of the wild fowl; what the ling, and the cod, and the skate fetched; where the wives and daughters sat and span and carded their wool; whether they knew how to make a good dish of cockles boiled in milk. She smiled to herself when she thought of asking Mrs. Lorraine about any such things; but she still cherished some vague hope that, before she left Brighton, she would have some little chance of getting near to the sea and learning a little of the sea-life down in the south.

And as they drove along the King's Road on this afternoon, she suddenly called out—

"Look, Frank!"

On the steps of the Old Ship hotel stood a small man with a brown face, a brown beard, and a beaver hat, who was calmly smoking a wooden pipe, and looking at an old woman selling oranges in front of him.

"It is Mr. Ingram!" said Sheila.

"Which is Mr. Ingram!" asked Mrs. Lorraine, with considerable interest, for she had often heard Lavender speak of his friend. "Not that little man?"

"Yes," said Lavender, coldly: he could have wished that Ingram had had some little more regard for appearances in so public a place as the main thoroughfare of Brighton.

"Won't you stop and speak to him?" said Sheila, with great surprise.

"We are late already," said her husband. "But if you would rather go back and speak to him than go on with us, you may."

Sheila said nothing more; and so they drove on to the end of the Parade, where Lady Leveret held possession of a big white house with pillars, overlooking the broad street and the sea.

But next morning she said to him—

"I suppose you will be riding with Mrs. Lorraine this morning?"

"I suppose so."

"I should like to go and see Mr. Ingram, if he is still there," she said.

"Ladies don't generally call at hotels and ask to see gentlemen," he said, with a laugh and a shrug; "but of course you don't care for that."

The permission, if it was intended to be a permission, was not very gracious, but Sheila accepted it, and very shortly after breakfast she changed her dress and went out. How pleasant it was to feel that she was going to see her old friend, to whom she could talk freely! The morning seemed to know of her gladness, and to share in it; for there was a brisk southerly breeze blowing fresh in from the sea, and the waves were leaping white in the sunlight. There was no more sluggishness in the air, or the grey sky, or the leaden plain of the sea. Sheila knew that the blood was mantling in her cheeks; that her heart was full of joy; that her whole frame so tingled with life and spirit that, had she been in Borva, she would have challenged her deer-hound to a race, and fled down the side of the hill with him to the small bay

of white sand below the house. She did not pause for a minute when she reached the hotel. She went up the steps, opened the door, and entered the square hall. There was an odour of tobacco in the place; and several gentlemen standing about rather confused her, for she had to glance at them in looking for a waiter. Another minute would probably have found her a trifle embarrassed: but just at this crisis she saw Ingram himself come out of a room, with a cigarette in his hand. He threw away the cigarette, and came forward to her with amazement in his eyes.

"Where is Mr. Lavender? Has he gone into the smoking-room for me?" he asked.

"He is not here," said Sheila. "I have come for you by myself."

For a moment, too, Ingram felt the eyes of the men on him; but directly he said, with a fine air of carelessness, "Well, that is very good of you. Shall we go out for a stroll until your husband comes?"

So he opened the door and followed her outside, into the fresh air and the roar of the waves.

"Well, Sheila," he said, "this is very good of you, really: where is Mr. Lavender?"

"He generally rides with Mrs. Lorraine in the morning."

"And what do you do?"

"I sit at the window."

"Don't you go boating?"

"No, I have not been in a boat. They do not care for it. And yesterday, it was a letter to Papa I was writing, and I could tell him nothing about the people here or the fishing."

"But you could not in any case, Sheila. I suppose you would like to know what they pay for their

lines, and how they dye their wool, and so on; but you would find the fishermen here don't live in that way at all. They are all civilized, you know, they buy their cloth in the shops. They never eat any sort of seaweed, or dye with it either. However, I will tell you all about it by and by. At present, I suppose you are returning to your hotel."

A quick look of pain and disappointment passed over her face, as she turned to him for a moment, with something of entreaty in her eyes.

"I came to see you," she said. "But perhaps you have an engagement—I do not wish to take up any of your time—if you please, I will go back alone to——"

"Now, Sheila," he said, with a smile, and with the old friendly look she knew so well, "you must not talk like that to me. I won't have it. You know I came down to Brighton because you asked me to come; and my time is altogether at your service."

"And you have no engagement just now?" said Sheila, with her face brightening.

"No."

"And you will take me down to the shore, to see the boats, and the nets? Or could we go out and run along the coast for a few miles? It is a very good wind."

"Oh, I should be very glad," said Ingram, slowly. "I should be delighted. But, you see, wouldn't your husband think it—wouldn't he, you know—wouldn't it seem just a little odd to him if you were to go away like that?"

"He is to go riding with Mrs. Lorraine," said Sheila, quite simply. "He does not want me."

"Of course you told him you were coming to see —you were going to call at the Old Ship?"

"Yes. And I am sure he would not be surprised if I did not return for a long time."

"Are you quite sure, Sheila?"

"Yes, I am quite sure."

"Very well. Now I shall tell you what I am going to do with you. I shall first go and bribe some mercenary boatman to let us have one of those small sailing boats committed to our own exclusive charge. I shall constitute you skipper and pilot of the craft, and hold you responsible for my safety. I shall smoke a pipe to prepare me for whatever may befall——"

"Oh, no," said Sheila. "You must work very hard; and I will see if you remember all that I taught you in the Lewis. And if we can have some long lines, we might get some fish. Will they pay more than thirty shillings for their long lines in this country?"

"I don't know," said Ingram. "I believe most of the fishermen here live upon the shillings they get from passers-by, after a little conversation about the weather, and their hard lot in life; so that one doesn't talk to them more than one can help."

"But why do they need the money? Is there no fish?"

"I don't know that, either. I suppose there is some good fishing in the winter, and sometimes in the summer they get some big shoals of mackerel."

"It was a letter I had last week from the sister of one of the men of the *Nighean-dubh*, and she told me that they have been very lucky all through the last season, and it was near six thousand ling they got."

"But I suppose they are hopelessly in debt to some curer or other up about Habost?"

"Oh no, not all. It is their own boat—it is not hired to them. And it is a very good boat whatever."

That unlucky "whatever" had slipped out inadvertently; the moment she had uttered it, she blushed, and looked timidly towards her companion, fearing that he had noticed it. He had not. How could she have made such a blunder? she asked herself. She had been most particular about the avoidance of this word, even in the Lewis. The girl did not know that, from the moment she had left the steps of the Old Ship, in company with this good friend of hers, she had unconsciously fallen into much of her old pronunciation and her old habit of speech; while Ingram, much more familiar with the Sheila of Borvabost and Loch Roag than the Sheila of Notting Hill and Kensington Gardens, did not perceive the difference, but was mightily pleased to hear her talk in any fashion whatsoever.

By fair means or foul, Ingram managed to secure a pretty little sailing vessel which lay at anchor out near the New Pier; and when the pecuniary negotiations were over, Sheila was invited to walk down over the loose stones of the beach, and take command of the craft. The boatman was still very doubtful. When he had pulled them out to the boat, however, and put them on board, he speedily perceived that this handsome young lady not only knew everything that had to be done in the way of getting the small vessel ready, but had a very smart and business-like way of doing it. It was very obvious that her companion did not know half as much about the matter

as she did; but he was obedient and watchful, and presently they were ready to start. The man put off in his boat to shore again much relieved in mind, but not a little puzzled to understand where the young lady had picked up, not merely her knowledge of boats, but the ready way in which she put her delicate hands to hard work, and the prompt and effectual fashion in which she accomplished it.

"Shall I belay away the jib, or reef the upper hatchways?" Ingram called out to Sheila, when they had fairly got under way.

She did not answer for a moment; she was still watching, with a critical eye, the manner in which the boat answered to her wishes; and then, when everything promised well, and she was quite satisfied, she said—

"If you will take my place for a moment, and keep a good look-out, I will put on my gloves."

She surrendered the tiller and the mainsail sheet into his care, and, with another glance ahead, pulled out her gloves.

"You did not use to fear the salt water or the sun on your hands, Sheila," said her companion.

"I do not now," she said, "but Frank would be displeased to see my hands brown. He has himself such pretty hands."

What Ingram thought about Frank Lavender's delicate hands he was not going to say to his wife; and, indeed, he was called upon at this moment to let Sheila resume her post, which she did with an air of great satisfaction and content.

And so they ran lightly through the curling and dashing water on this brilliant day, caring little indeed for the great town that lay away to leeward, with its

shining terraces surmounted by a faint cloud of smoke. Here all the roar of carriages and people was unheard: the only sound that accompanied their talk was the splashing of the waves at the prow and the hissing and gurgling of the water along the boat. The south wind blew fresh and sweet around them, filling the broad, white sails, and fluttering the small pennon up there in the blue. It seemed strange to Sheila that she should be so much alone with so great a town close by; that under the boom she could catch a glimpse of the noisy Parade without hearing any of its noise. But there, away to windward, there was no more trace of city life—only the great blue sea, with its waves flowing on towards them from out of the far horizon, and with here and there a pale ship just appearing on the line where the sky and ocean met.

"Well, Sheila, how do you like to be on the sea again?" said Ingram, getting out his pipe.

"Oh, very well. But you must not smoke, Mr. Ingram; you must attend to the boat."

"Don't you feel at home in her yet?" he asked.

"I am not afraid of her," said Sheila, regarding the lines of the small craft with the eye of a ship-builder, "but she is very narrow in the beam, and she carries too much sail for so small a thing. I suppose they have not any squalls on this coast, where you have no hills, and no Narrows to go through."

"It doesn't remind you of Lewis, does it?" he said, filling his pipe all the same.

"A little—out there it does," she said, turning to the broad plain of the sea; "but it is not much that is in this country that is like the Lewis—sometimes I think I shall be a stranger when I go back to the

Lewis, and the people will scarcely know me, and everything will be changed."

He looked at her for a second or two. Then he laid down his pipe, which had not been lit, and said to her, gravely—

"I want you to tell me, Sheila, why you have got into a habit lately of talking about many things, and especially about your home in the north, in that sad way. You did not do that when you came to London first; and yet it was then that you might have been struck and shocked by the difference. You had no home-sickness for a long time—but is it home-sickness, Sheila?"

How was she to tell him? For an instant she was on the point of giving him all her confidence; and then, somehow or other, it occurred to her that she would be wronging her husband in seeking such sympathy from a friend as she had been expecting—and expecting in vain—from him.

"Perhaps it is home-sickness," she said, in a low voice, while she pretended to be busy tightening up the mainsail sheet. "I should like to see Borva again."

"But you don't want to live there all your life?" he said. "You know that would be unreasonable, Sheila, even if your husband could manage it, and I don't suppose he can. Surely your papa does not expect you to go and live in Lewis always?"

"Oh no," she said, eagerly. "You must not think my papa wishes anything like that. It will be much less than that he was thinking of when he used to speak to Mr. Lavender about it. And I do not wish to live in the Lewis always—I have no dislike to London—none at all—only that—that——"

And here she paused.

"Come, Sheila," he said, in the old paternal way to which she had been accustomed to yield up all her own wishes in the old days of their friendship, "I want you to be frank with me, and tell me what is the matter. I know there is something wrong; I have seen it for some time back. Now you know I took the responsibility of your marriage on my shoulders; and I am responsible to you, and to your papa and to myself, for your comfort and happiness. Do you understand?"

She still hesitated—grateful in her inmost heart; but still doubtful as to what she should do.

"You look on me as an intermeddler," he said, with a smile.

"No, no!" she said, "you have always been our best friend."

"But I have intermeddled none the less—don't you remember when I told you I was prepared to accept the consequences?"

It seemed so long a time since then!

"And once having begun to intermeddle, I can't stop, don't you see? Now, Sheila, you'll be a good little girl, and do what I tell you. You'll take the boat a long way out, we'll put her head round, take down the sails, and let her tumble about and drift for a time, till you tell me all about your troubles, and then we'll see what can be done."

She obeyed in silence; with her face grown grave enough in anticipation of the coming disclosures. She knew that the first plunge into them would be keenly painful to her; but there was a feeling at her heart that, this penance over, a great relief would be at

hand. She trusted this man as she would have trusted her own father. She knew that there was nothing on earth he would not attempt, if he fancied it would help her. And she knew, too, that having experienced so much of his great unselfishness and kindness and thoughtfulness, she was ready to obey him implicitly, in anything that he could assure her was right for her to do.

How far away seemed the white cliffs now, and the faint green downs above them! Brighton, lying farther to the west, had become dim and yellow, and over it a cloud of smoke lay thick and brown in the sunlight. A mere streak showed the line of the King's Road and all its carriages and people; the beach beneath could just be made out by the white dots of the bathing-machines. The brown fishing-boats seemed to be close in shore; the two piers were foreshortened into small dusky masses marking the beginning of the sea. And then, from these distant and faintly-defined objects, out here to the side of the small white-and-pink boat, that lay lightly in the lapping water, stretched that great and moving network of waves, with here and there a sharp gleam of white foam curling over amid the dark blue-green.

Ingram took his seat by Sheila's side, so that he should not have to look in her downcast face; and then, with some little preliminary nervousness and hesitation, the girl told her story. She told it to sympathetic ears: and yet Ingram—having partly guessed how matters stood, and anxious, perhaps, to know whether much of her trouble might not be merely the result of fancies which could be reasoned and explained away—was careful to avoid anything like corroboration. He let her talk in her own simple

and artless way; and the girl spoke to him, after a little while, with an earnestness which showed how deeply she felt her position. At the very outset she told him that her love for her husband had never altered for a moment—that all the prayer and desire of her heart was that they two might be to each other as she had at one time hoped they would be, when he got to know her better. She went over all the story of her coming to London, of her first experiences there, of the conviction that grew upon her that her husband was somehow disappointed with her and only anxious now that she should conform to the ways and habits of the people with whom he associated. She spoke of her efforts to obey his wishes, and how heart-sick she was with her failures, and of the dissatisfaction which he showed. She spoke of the people to whom he devoted his life; of the way in which he passed his time; and of the impossibility of her showing him, so long as he thus remained apart from her, the love she had in her heart for him, and the longing for sympathy which that love involved. And then she came to the question of Mrs. Lorraine; and here it seemed to Ingram she was trying at once to put her husband's conduct in the most favourable light, and to blame herself for her unreasonableness. Mrs. Lorraine was a pleasant companion to him: she could talk cleverly and brightly; she was pretty, and she knew a large number of his friends. Sheila was anxious to show that it was the most natural thing in the world that her husband, finding her so out of communion with his ordinary surroundings, should make an especial friend of this graceful and fascinating woman. And if, at times, it hurt her to be left

alone—but here the girl broke down somewhat, and Ingram pretended not to know that she was crying.

These were strange things to be told to a man; and they were difficult to answer. But out of these revelations—which rather took the form of a cry than of any distinct statement—he formed a notion of Sheila's position sufficiently exact; and the more he looked at it, the more alarmed and pained he grew, for he knew more of her than her husband did. He knew the latent force of character that underlay all her submissive gentleness. He knew the keen sense of pride her Highland birth had given her; and he feared what might happen if this sensitive and proud heart of hers were driven into rebellion by some—possibly unintentional—wrong. And this high-spirited, fearless, honour-loving girl—who was gentle and obedient, not through any timidity or limpness of character, but because she considered it her duty to be gentle and obedient—was to be cast aside, and have her tenderest feelings outraged and wounded, for the sake of an unscrupulous, shallow-brained woman of fashion who was not fit to be Sheila's waiting-maid. Ingram had never seen Mrs. Lorraine; but he had formed his own opinion of her. The opinion, based upon nothing, was wholly wrong; but it served to increase, if that were possible, his sympathy with Sheila, and his resolve to interfere on her behalf at whatever cost.

"Sheila," he said, gravely putting his hand on her shoulder, as if she were still the little girl who used to run wild with him about the Borva rocks, "you are a good woman."

He added to himself that Lavender knew little of the value of the wife he had got; but he dared not

say that to Sheila, who would suffer no imputation against her husband to be uttered in her presence, however true it might be, or however much she had cause to know it to be true.

"And after all," he said, in a lighter voice, "I think I can do something to mend all this. I will say for Frank Lavender that he is a thoroughly good fellow at heart; and that when you appeal to him, and put things fairly before him, and show him what he ought to do, there is not a more honourable and straightforward man in the world. I believe, if I wanted money this moment, and it could only be got that way, he would live for a month on bread and water to give it me. He is not selfish, Sheila, but he is thoughtless. He has been led away by these people, you know, and has not been aware of what you were suffering. When I put the matter before him, you will see it will be all right; and I hope to persuade him to give up this constant idling, and take to his work, and have something to live for. I wish you and I together could get him to go away from London altogether—get him to take to serious landscape painting on some wild coast—the Galway coast, for example——"

"Why not the Lewis?" said Sheila, her heart turning to the north as naturally as the needle.

"Or the Lewis. And I should like you and him to live away from hotels, and luxuries, and all such things; and he would work all day, and you would do the cooking, in some small cottage you could rent, you know——"

"You make me so happy in thinking of that," she said, with her eyes growing wet again.

"And why should he not do so? There is nothing

romantic or idyllic about it; but a good, wholesome, plain sort of life, that is likely to make an honest painter of him, and bring both of you some well-earned money. And you might have a boat like this——"

"We are drifting too far in," said Sheila, suddenly rising. "Shall we go back now?"

"By all means," he said; and so the small boat was put under canvas again, and was soon making way through the breezy water.

"Well, all this seems simple enough, doesn't it?" said Ingram.

"Yes," said the girl, with her face full of hope.

"And then, of course, when you are quite comfortable together, and making heaps of money, you can turn round and abuse me, and say I made all the mischief to begin with."

"Did we do so before, when you were very kind to us?" she said, in a low voice.

"Oh, but that was different. To interfere on behalf of two young folks who are in love with each other is dangerous; but to interfere between two people who are married—that is a certain quarrel. I wonder what you will say when you are scolding me, Sheila, and bidding me get out of the house. I have never heard you scold. Is it Gaelic or English you prefer?"

"I prefer whichever can say the nicest things to my very good friends, and tell them how grateful I am for their kindness to me."

"Ah, well, we'll see."

When they got back to shore it was half-past one.

"You will come and have some luncheon with us," said Sheila, when they had gone up the steps and into the King's Road.

"Will that lady be there?"

"Mrs. Lorraine? Yes."

"Then I'll come some other time."

"But why not now?" said Sheila. "It is not necessary that you will see us only to speak about those things we have been talking over?"

"Oh no, not at all. If you and Mr. Lavender were by yourselves I should come at once."

"And you are afraid of Mrs. Lorraine?" said Sheila, with a smile. "She is a very nice lady indeed—you have no cause to dislike her."

"But I don't want to meet her, Sheila, that is all," he said; and she knew well, by the precision of his manner, that there was no use trying to persuade him further.

He walked along to the hotel with her, meeting a considerable stream of fashionably-dressed folks on the way; and neither he nor she seemed to remember that his costume—a blue pilot-jacket, not a little worn and soiled with the salt water, and a beaver hat that had seen a good deal of rough weather in the Highlands—was much more comfortable than elegant. He said to her, as he left her at the hotel—

"Would you mind telling Lavender I shall drop in at half-past three, and that I expect to see him in the coffee-room? I sha'n't keep him five minutes."

She looked at him for a moment; and he saw that she knew what his appointment meant, for her eyes were full of gladness and gratitude. He went away pleased at heart that she put so much trust in him. And in this case, he should be able to reward that confidence; for Lavender was really a good sort of fellow, and would at once be sorry for the wrong he had unintentionally done, and be only too anxious to set it right. He ought to leave Brighton at once, and

London too. He ought to go away into the country, or by the seaside, and begin working hard, to earn money and self-respect at the same time; and then, in this friendly solitude, he would get to know something about Sheila's character, and begin to perceive how much more valuable were these genuine qualities of heart and mind than any social graces such as might lighten up a dull drawing-room. Had Lavender yet learnt to know the worth of an honest woman's perfect love and unquestioning devotion? Let these things be put before him, and he would go and do the right thing, as he had many a time done before, in obedience to the lecturing of his friend.

Ingram called at half-past three, and went into the coffee-room. There was no one in the long, large room; and he sat down at one of the small tables by the windows, from which a bit of lawn, the King's Road, and the sea beyond were visible. He had scarcely taken his seat when Lavender came in.

"Hallo, Ingram, how are you?" he said, in his freest and friendliest way. "Won't you come upstairs? Have you had lunch? Why did you go to the Ship?"

"I always go to the Ship," he said. "No, thank you, I won't go upstairs."

"You are a most unsociable sort of brute!" said Lavender, frankly. "I shall paint a portrait of you some day, in the character of Diogenes, or Apemantus, or some one like that. I should like to do a portrait of you for Sheila—how pleased she would be! Will you take a glass of sherry?"

"No, thank you."

"Will you have a game at billiards?"

"No, thank you. You don't mean to say you would play billiards on such a day as this?"

"It *is* a fine day, isn't it?" said Lavender, turning to look at the sunlit road and the blue sea. "By the way, Sheila tells me you and she were out sailing this morning. It must have been very pleasant—especially for her, for she is mad about such things. What a curious girl she is, to be sure! Don't you think so?"

"I don't know what you mean by curious," said Ingram, coldly.

"Well, you know, strange—odd—unlike other people in her ways and her fancies. Did I tell you about my aunt taking her to see some friends of hers at Norwood? No? Well, Sheila had got out of the house somehow (I suppose their talking did not interest her), and when they went in search of her, they found her in the cemetery, crying like a child."

"What about?"

"Why," said Lavender, with a smile, "merely because so many people had died. She had never seen anything like that before—you know the small churchyards up in Lewis, with their inscriptions in Norwegian, and Danish, and German. I suppose the first sight of all the white stones at Norwood was too much for her."

"Well, I don't see much of a joke in that," said Ingram.

"Who said there was any joke in it?" cried Lavender, impatiently. "I never knew such a cantankerous fellow as you are. You are always fancying I am finding fault with Sheila. And I never do anything of the kind. She is a very good girl indeed. I have every reason to be satisfied with the way our marriage has turned out."

"*Has she?*"

The words were not important: but there was something in the tone in which they were spoken that suddenly checked Frank Lavender's careless flow of speech. He looked at Ingram for a moment, with some surprise, and then he said—

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I will tell you what I mean," said Ingram, slowly. "It is an awkward thing for a man to interfere between husband and wife, I am aware. He gets something else than thanks for his pains, ordinarily; but sometimes it has to be done, thanks or kicks. Now, you know, Lavender, I had a good deal to do with helping forward your marriage in the north; and I don't remind you of that to claim anything in the way of consideration, but to explain why I think I am called on to speak to you now."

Lavender was at once a little frightened and a little irritated. He half guessed what might be coming from the slow and precise manner in which Ingram talked. That form of speech had vexed him many a time before; for he would rather have had any amount of wild contention, and bandying about of reproaches, than the calm, unimpassioned and sententious setting forth of his shortcomings to which this sallow little man was perhaps too much addicted.

"I suppose Sheila has been complaining to you, then?" said Lavender, coldly.

"You may suppose what you like," said Ingram, quietly; "but it would be a good deal better if you would listen to me patiently, and deal in a common-sense fashion with what I have got to say. It is nothing very desperate. Nothing has happened that is not of easy remedy; while the remedy would leave

you and her in a much better position, both as regards your own estimation of yourselves, and the opinion of your friends."

"You are a little roundabout, Ingram," said Lavender, "and ornate. But I suppose all lectures begin so. Go on."

Ingram laughed.

"If I am too formal, it is because I don't want to make mischief by any exaggeration. Look here. A long time before you were married, I warned you that Sheila had very keen and sensitive notions about the duties that people ought to perform—about the dignity of labour—about the proper occupations of a man, and so forth. These notions you may regard as romantic and absurd, if you like; but you might as well try to change the colour of her eyes as attempt to alter any of her beliefs in that direction——"

"And she thinks that I am idle and indolent because I don't care what a washerwoman pays for her candles," said Lavender, with impetuous contempt. "Well, be it so. She is welcome to her opinion. But if she is grieved at heart because I can't make hob-nailed boots, it seems to me that she might as well come and complain to myself, instead of going and detailing her wrongs to a third person, and calling for his sympathy in the character of an injured wife."

For an instant the dark eyes of the man opposite him blazed with a quick fire—for a sneer at Sheila was worse than an insult to himself; but he kept quite calm, and said

"That, unfortunately, is not what is troubling her——"

Lavender rose abruptly, took a turn up and down the empty room, and said—

"If there is anything the matter, I prefer to hear it from herself. It is not respectful to me, that she should call in a third person to humour her whims and fancies——"

"Whims and fancies!" said Ingram, with that dark light returning to his eyes. "Do you know what you are talking about? Do you know that, while you are living upon the charity of a woman you despise, and dawdling about the skirts of another woman who laughs at you, you are breaking the heart of a girl who has not her equal in England? Whims and fancies! Good God! I wonder how she ever could have——"

He stopped, but the mischief was done. These were not prudent words to come from a man who wished to step in as mediator between husband and wife—perhaps they were as unjust as they were imprudent; but Ingram's blaze of wrath—kindled by what he considered the insufferable insolence of Lavender in thus speaking of Sheila—had swept all notions of prudence from it. Lavender, indeed, was much cooler than he was, and said, with an affectation of carelessness—

"I am sorry you should vex yourself so much about Sheila. One would think you had had the ambition yourself, at some time or other, to play the part of husband to her; and doubtless then you would have made sure that all her idle fancies were gratified. As it is, I was about to relieve you from the trouble of further explanation by saying that I was quite competent to manage my own affairs; and that if Sheila has any complaint to make, she must make it to me."

Ingram rose, and was silent for a moment.

"Lavender," he said, "it does not matter much

whether you and I quarrel—I was prepared for that, in any case. But I ask you to give Sheila a chance of telling you what I had intended to tell you."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort. I never invite confidences. When she wishes to tell me anything, she knows I am ready to listen. But I am quite satisfied with the position of affairs as they are at present."

"God help you, then," said his friend, and went away, scarcely daring to confess to himself how dark the future looked.

CHAPTER II.

Exchanges.

JUST as Frank Lavender went downstairs to meet Ingram, a letter which had been forwarded from London was brought to Sheila. It bore the Lewis postmark, and she guessed it was from Duncan, for she had told Mairi to ask the tall keeper to write, and she knew he would hasten to obey her request at any sacrifice of comfort to himself. Sheila sat down to read the letter in a happy frame of mind. She had every confidence that all her troubles were about to be removed now that her good friend Ingram had come to her husband; and here was a message to her from her home, that seemed, even before she read it, to beg of her to come thither, light-hearted and joyous. This was what she read:—

"BORVABOST, THE ISLAND OF LEWS,
"*the third Aug.*, 18—.

"HONOURED MRS. LAVENDER,—It waz Mairi waz sayin that you will want me to write to you, bit I am not good at the writen whatever, and it waz 2 years

since I waz writen to Amerika, to John Ferkason that kept the tea-shop in Stornoway, and was trooned in coming home the verra last year before this. It waz Mairi will say you will like a letter as well as any one that waz goin to Amerika, for the news and the things, and you will be as far away from us as if you waz living in Amerika or Glaska. But there is not much news, for the lads they hev all pulled up the boats, and they are away to Wick, and Sandy McDougal that waz living by Loch Langavat he will be going too, for he waz up at the sheilings when Mrs. Paterson's lasses waz there with the cows, and it waz Jeanie the youngest and him made it up, and he haz twenty-five pounds in the bank, which is a good thing too mirover for the young couple. It waz many a one waz sayin when the crows and the sheep waz come home from the sheilings that never afore waz Miss Sheila away from Loch Roag when the cattle would be swimmin across the loch to the island; and I will say to many of them verra well you will wait and you will see Miss Sheila back again in the Lews and it wazna allwas you would lif away from your own home where you was born and the people will know you from the one year to the next. John McNicol of Habost he will be verra bad three months or two months ago, and we waz thinkin he will die, and him with a wife and five bairns too, and four cows and a cart, but the doctor took a great dale of blood from him, and he is now verra well whatever, though wakely on the legs. It would hev been a bad thing if Mr. McNicol was dead, for he will be verra good at pentin a door, and he haz between fifteen pounds and ten pounds in the bank at Stornoway, and four cows too and a cart, and he is a ferra religious man, and has

great skill o the psalm-tunes, and he toesna get trunk now more as twice or as three times in the two weeks. It was his dochter Betsy, a verra fine lass, that waz come to Borvabost, and it waz the talk among many that Alister-nan-Each he waz thinkin of makin up to her, but there will be a great laugh all over the island, and she will be verra angry and say she will not have him no if his house had a door of silfer to it for she will hev no one that toesna go to the Caithness fishins wi the other lads. It waz blew verra hard here the last night or two or three. There iss a great deal of salmon in the rivers; and Mr. Mackenzie he will be going across to Grimersta, the day after to-morrow, or the next day before that, and the English gentlemen hev been there more as two or three weeks, and they will be getting verra good sport whatever. Mairi she will be writen a letter to you to-morrow, Miss Sheila, and she will be telling you all the news of the house. Mairi waz sayin she will be goin to London when the harvest was got in, and Scarlett will say to her that no one will let her land on the island again if she toesna bring you back with her to the island and to your own house. If it waz not too much trouble, Miss Sheila, it would be a proud day for Scarlett if you waz send me a line or two lines to say if you will be coming to the Lews this summer or before the winter is over whatever. I remain, Honoured Mrs. Lavender, your obedient servant,

"DUNCAN MACDONALD."

"This summer or winter," said Sheila to herself, with a happy light on her face; "why not now?" Why should she not go downstairs to the coffee-room of the hotel, and place this invitation in the

hands of her husband and his friend? Would not its garrulous simplicity recall to both of them the island they used to find so pleasant? Would not they suddenly resolve to leave behind them London and its ways and people, even this monotonous sea out there, and speed away northward till they came in sight of the great and rolling Minch, with its majestic breadth of sky and its pale blue islands lying far away at the horizon? Then the happy landing at Stornoway—her father, and Duncan, and Mairi all on the quay—the rapid drive over to Loch Roag, and the first glimpse of the rocky bays, and clear water, and white sand about Borva and Borvabost! And Sheila would once more—having cast aside this cumbrous attire that she had to change so often, and having got out that neat and simple costume that was so good for walking, or driving, or sailing—be proud to wait upon her guests, and help Mairi in her household ways, and have a pretty table ready for the gentlemen when they returned from the shooting.

Her husband came up the hotel stairs and entered the room. She rose to meet him, with the open letter in her hand.

"Sheila," he said (and the light slowly died away from her face), "I have something to ask of you."

She knew by the sound of his voice that she had nothing to hope: it was not the first time she had been disappointed, and yet this time it seemed especially bitter somehow. The awakening from these illusions was sudden.

She did not answer, so he said, in the same measured voice—

"I have to ask that you will have henceforth no

communication with Mr. Ingram; I do not wish him to come to the house."

She stood for a moment, apparently not understanding the meaning of what he said. Then, when the full force of this decision and request came upon her, a quick colour sprang to her face—the cause of which, if it had been revealed to him in words, would have considerably astonished her husband. But the moment of doubt, of surprise, of inward indignation, was soon over. She cast down her eyes, and said meekly—

"Very well, dear."

It was now his turn to be astonished, and mortified as well. He could not have believed it possible that she should so calmly acquiesce in the dismissal of one of her dearest friends. He had expected a more or less angry protest, if not a distinct refusal, which would have given him an opportunity for displaying the injuries he conceived himself to have suffered at their hands. Why had she not come to himself? This man Ingram was presuming on his ancient friendship, and on the part he had taken in forwarding the marriage up in Borva. He had always, moreover, been somewhat too much of the schoolmaster—with his severe judgments, his sententious fashion of criticising and warning people, and his readiness to prove the whole world wrong in order to show himself to be right. All these and many other things Lavender meant to say to Sheila, so soon as she had protested against his forbidding Ingram to come any more to the house. But there was no protest. Sheila did not even seem surprised. She went back to her seat by the window, folded up Duncan's letter, and put it in her pocket; and then she turned to look at the sea.

Lavender regarded her for a moment, apparently doubting whether he should himself prosecute the subject; then he turned and left the room.

Sheila did not cry or otherwise seek to compassionate and console herself. Her husband had told her to do a certain thing; and she would do it. Perhaps she had been imprudent in having confided in Mr. Ingram; and, if so, it was right that she should be punished. But the regret and pain that lay deep in her heart was that Ingram should have suffered through her, and that she had no opportunity of telling him that, though they might not see each other, she would never forget her friendship for him, or cease to be grateful to him for his unceasing and generous kindness to her.

Next morning Lavender was summoned to London by a telegram which announced that his aunt was seriously ill. He and Sheila got ready at once, left by a forenoon train, had some brief luncheon at home, and then went down to see the old lady in Kensington Gore. During their journey, Lavender had been rather more courteous and kindly towards Sheila than was his wont. Was he pleased that she had so readily obeyed him in this matter of giving up about the only friend she had in London? Or was he moved by some visitation of compunction? Sheila tried to show that she was grateful for his kindness; but there was that between them which could not be removed by chance phrases or attentions. Mrs. Lavender was in her own room. Paterson brought word that she wanted to see Sheila first and alone; so Lavender sat down in the gloomy drawing-room by the window, and watched the people riding and driving past, and the sunshine on the dusty green trees in the Park.

"Is Frank Lavender below?" said the thin old woman, who was propped up in bed, with some scarlet garment around her that made her resemble more than ever the cockatoo of which Sheila had thought on first seeing her.

"Yes," said Sheila.

"I want to see you alone—I can't bear him dawdling about a room, and staring at things, and saying nothing. Does he speak to you?"

Sheila did not wish to enter into any controversy about the habits of her husband, so she said:

"I hope you will see him before he goes, Mrs. Lavender. He is very anxious to know how you are; and I am glad to find you looking so well. You do not look like an invalid at all."

"Oh, I'm not going to die yet," said the little dried old woman, with the harsh voice, the staring eyes, and the tightly-twisted grey hair. "I hope you didn't come to read the Bible to me—you wouldn't find one about in any case, I should think. If you like to sit down and read the sayings of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, I should enjoy that; but I suppose you are too busy thinking what dress you'll wear at my funeral."

"Indeed I was thinking of no such thing," said Sheila, indignantly, but feeling all the same that the hard, glittering, expressionless eyes were watching her.

"Do you think I believe you?" said Mrs. Lavender. "Bah! I hope I am able to recognize the facts of life. If you were to die this afternoon, I should get a black silk trimmed with crape the moment I got on my feet again, and go to your funeral in the ordinary way. I

hope you will pay me the same respect. Do you think I am afraid to speak of these things?"

"Why should you speak of them?" said Sheila, despairingly.

"Because it does you good to contemplate the worst that can befall you; and if it does not happen, you may rejoice. And it will happen. I know that I shall be lying in this bed, with a half-a-dozen of you round about trying to cry, and wondering which will have the courage to turn and go out of the room first. Then there will be the funeral day, and Paterson will be careful about the blinds, and go about the house on her tip-toes, as if I were likely to hear! Then there will be a pretty service up in the cemetery, and a man who never saw me will speak of his dear sister departed; and then you'll all go home and have your dinner. Am I afraid of it?——"

"Why should you talk like that?" said Sheila, piteously. "You are not going to die. You distress yourself and others by thinking of these horrible things——"

"My dear child, there is nothing horrible in nature. Everything is part of the universal system which you should recognize and accept. If you had trained yourself now, by the study of philosophical works, to know how helpless you are to alter the facts of life, and how it is the best wisdom to be prepared for the worst, you would find nothing horrible in thinking of your own funeral. You are not looking well."

Sheila was startled by the suddenness of the announcement.

"Perhaps I am a little tired with the travelling we have done to-day."

"Is Frank Lavender kind to you?"

What was she to say, with those two eyes scanning her face?

"It is too soon to expect him to be anything else," she said, with an effort at a smile.

"Ah! So you are beginning to talk in that way? I thought you were full of sentimental notions of life when you came to London. It is not a good place for nurturing such things."

"It is not," said Sheila, surprised into a sigh.

"Come nearer. Don't be afraid I shall bite you. I am not so ferocious as I look."

Sheila rose and went closer to the bedside; and the old woman stretched out a lean and withered hand to her.

"If I thought that that silly fellow wasn't behaving well to you——"

"I will not listen to you," said Sheila, suddenly withdrawing her hand, while a quick colour leapt to her face; "I will not listen to you if you speak of my husband in that way."

"I will speak of him any way you like. Don't get into a rage. I have known Frank Lavender a good deal longer than you have. What I was going to say is this—that if I thought that he was not behaving well to you, I would play him a trick. I would leave my money, which is all he has got to live on, to you; and when I died he would find himself dependent on you for every farthing he wanted to spend."

And the old woman laughed—with very little of the weakness of an invalid in the look of her face. But Sheila, when she had mastered her surprise, and resolved not to be angry, said calmly—

"Whatever I have, whatever I might have, that belongs to my husband, not to me."

"Now you speak like a sensible girl," said Mrs. Lavender. "That is the misfortune of a wife, that she cannot keep her own money to herself. But there are means by which the law may be defeated, my dear. I have been thinking it over; I have been speaking of it to Mr. Ingram; for I have suspected for some time that my nephew, Mr. Frank, was not behaving himself."

"Mrs. Lavender," said Sheila, with a face too proud and indignant for tears, "you do not understand me. No one has the right to imagine anything against my husband, and to seek to punish him through me. And when I said that everything that I have belongs to him, I was not thinking of the law—no—but only this: that everything that I have, or might have, would belong to him, as I myself belong to him, of my own free will and gift; and I would have no money, or anything else that was not entirely his."

"You are a fool."

"Perhaps," said Sheila, struggling to repress her tears.

"What if I were to leave every farthing of my property to a hospital? Where would Frank Lavender be then?"

"He could earn his own living without any such help," said Sheila, proudly: for she had never yet given up the hope that her husband would fulfil the fair promise of an earlier time, and win great renown for himself in striving to please her, as he had many a time vowed he would do.

"He has taken great care to conceal his powers in that way," said the old woman, with a sneer.

"And if he has, whose fault is it?" the girl said, warmly. "Who has kept him in idleness but yourself

And now you blame him for it. I wish he had never had any of your money—I wish he were never to have any more of it——"

And then Sheila stopped, with a terrible dread falling over her. What had she not said? The pride of her race had carried her so far, and she had given expression to all the tumult of her heart; but had she not betrayed her duty as a wife, and grievously compromised the interests of her husband? And yet the indignation in her bosom was too strong to admit of her retracting those fatal phrases, and begging forgiveness. She stood for a moment, irresolute; and she knew that the invalid was regarding her curiously, as though she were some wild animal, and not an ordinary resident in Bayswater.

"You are a little mad, but you are a good girl, and I want to be friends with you. You have in you the spirit of a dozen Frank Lavenders."

"You will never make friends with me by speaking ill of my husband," said Sheila, with the same proud and indignant look.

"Not when he ill-uses you?"

"He does not ill-use me. What has Mr. Ingram been saying to you?"

The sudden question would certainly have brought about a disclosure, if any were to have been made; but Mrs. Lavender assured Sheila that Mr. Ingram had told her nothing, that she had been forming her own conclusions, and that she still doubted that they were right.

"Now sit down and read to me. You will find Marcus Aurelius on the top of those books."

"Frank is in the drawing-room," observed Sheila, mildly.

"He can wait," said the old woman, sharply.

"Yes, but you cannot expect me to keep him waiting," with a smile which did not conceal her very definite purpose.

"Then ring, and bid him come up. You will soon get rid of those absurd sentiments."

Sheila rang the bell, and sent Mrs. Paterson down for Lavender; but she did not betake herself to Marcus Aurelius. She waited a few minutes, and then her husband made his appearance, whereupon she sat down, and left to him the agreeable duty of talking with this toothless old heathen about funerals and lingering death.

"Well, Aunt Lavender, I am sorry to hear you have been ill, but I suppose you are getting all right again, to judge by your looks."

"I am not nearly as ill as you expected."

"I wonder you did not say 'hoped'!" remarked Lavender, carelessly. "You are always attributing the most charitable feelings to your fellow-creatures."

"Frank Lavender," said the old lady, who was a little pleased by this bit of flattery, "if you came here to make yourself impertinent and disagreeable, you can go downstairs again. Your wife and I get on very well without you."

"I am glad to hear it," he said; "I suppose you have been telling her what is the matter with you."

"I have not. I don't know. I have had a pain in the head, and two fits, and I dare say the next will carry me off. The doctors won't tell me anything about it, so I suppose it is serious——"

"Nonsense!" cried Lavender. "Serious! To look at you, one would say you never had been ill in your life."

"Don't tell stories, Frank Lavender. I know I look like a corpse; but I don't mind it, for I avoid the looking-glass, and keep the spectacle for my friends. I expect the next fit will kill me."

"I'll tell you what it is, Aunt Lavender; if you would only get up and come with us for a drive in the Park, you would find there was nothing of an invalid about you; and we should take you home to a quiet dinner at Notting Hill, and Sheila would sing to you all the evening, and to-morrow you would receive the doctors in state in your drawing-room, and tell them you were going for a month to Malvern."

"Your husband has a fine imagination, my dear," said Mrs. Lavender to Sheila. "It is a pity he puts it to no use. Now I shall let both of you go. Three breathing in this room are too many for the cubic feet of air it contains. Frank, bring over those scales and put them on the table; and send Paterson to me as you go out."

And so they went downstairs, and out of the house. Just as they stood on the steps, looking for a hansom, a young lad came forward, and shook hands with Lavender, glancing rather nervously at Sheila.

"Well, Mosenberg," said Lavender, "you've come back from Leipsic at last. We got your card when we came home this morning from Brighton. Let me introduce you to my wife."

The boy looked at the beautiful face before him with something of distant wonder and reverence in his regard. Sheila had heard of the lad before—of the Mendelssohn that was to be—and liked his appearance at first sight. He was a rather handsome boy of fourteen or fifteen, of the fair Jew type, with large, dark expressive eyes, and long, wavy, light-brown hair.

He spoke English fluently and well; his slight German accent was, indeed, scarcely so distinct as Sheila's Highland one; the chief peculiarity of his speaking being a preference for short sentences, as if he were afraid to venture upon elaborate English. He had not addressed a dozen sentences to Sheila before she had begun to have a liking for the lad; perhaps on account of his soft and musical voice; perhaps on account of the respectful and almost wondering admiration that dwelt in his eyes. He spoke to her as if she were some saint, who had but to smile to charm and bewilder the humble worshipper at her shrine.

"I was intending to call upon Mrs. Lavender, Madame," he said. "I heard that she was ill. Perhaps you can tell me if she is better."

"She seems to be very well to-day, and in very good spirits," Sheila answered.

"Then I will not go in. Did you propose to take a walk in the Park, Madame?"

Lavender inwardly laughed at the magnificent audacity of the lad; and, seeing that Sheila hesitated, humoured him by saying—

"Well, we were thinking of calling on one or two people before going home to dinner. But I haven't seen you for a long time, Mosenberg; and I want you to tell me how you succeeded at the Conservatoire. If you like to walk with us for a bit, we can give you something to eat at seven."

"That would be very pleasant for me," said the boy, blushing somewhat, "if it does not incommode you, Madame."

"Oh, no—I hope you will come," said Sheila, most heartily; and so they set out for a walk through Kensington Gardens northward.

Precious little did Lavender learn about Leipsic during that walk. The boy devoted himself wholly to Sheila. He had heard frequently of her, and he knew of her coming from the wild and romantic Hebrides; and he began to tell her of all the experiments that composers had made in representing the sound of seas, and storms, and winds howling through caverns washed by the waves. Lavender liked music well enough, and could himself play and sing a little; but this enthusiasm rather bored him. He wanted to know if the yellow wine was still as cool and clear as ever down in the twilight of Auerbach's cellar, what burlesques had lately been played at the theatre, and whether such and such a beer-garden was still to the fore; whereas he heard only analyses of overtures, and descriptions of the uses of particular musical instruments, and a wild rhapsody about moonlit seas, the sweetness of French horns, the King of Thule, and a dozen other matters.

"Mosenberg," he said, "before you go calling on people, you ought to visit an English tailor. People will think you belong to a German band."

"I have been to a tailor," said the lad, with a frank laugh. "My parents, Madame, wish me to be quite English—that is why I am sent to live in London, while they are in Frankfort. I stay with some good friends of mine, who are very musical, and they are not annoyed by my practising, as other people would be."

"I hope you will sing something to us this evening," said Sheila.

"I will sing and play for you all the evening," he said lightly, "until you are tired. But you must tell me when you are tired; for who can tell how much

music will be enough? Sometimes two or three songs are more than enough to make people wish you away."

"You need have no fear of tiring me," said Sheila. "But when you are tired, I will sing for you."

"Yes, of course you sing, Madame," he said, casting down his eyes; "I knew that when I saw you."

Sheila had got a sweetheart; and Lavender saw it, and smiled good-naturedly. The awe and reverence with which this lad regarded the beautiful woman beside him were something new and odd in Kensington Gardens. Yet it was the way of those boys. He had himself had his imaginative fits of worship, in which some very ordinary young woman, who ate a good breakfast, and spent an hour and a half in arranging her hair before going out, was regarded as some beautiful goddess fresh risen from the sea, or descended from the clouds. Young Mosenberg was just at the proper age for these foolish dreams. He would sing songs to Sheila, and reveal to her that way of passion of which he dare not otherwise speak. He would compose pieces of music for her, and dedicate them to her, and spend half his quarterly money in having them printed. He would grow to consider him, Lavender, a heartless brute, and cherish dark notions of poisoning him, but for the pain it might cause to her.

"I don't remember whether you smoke, Mosenberg," Lavender said, after dinner.

"Yes—a cigarette sometimes," said the lad; "but if Mrs. Lavender is going away, perhaps she will let me go into the drawing-room with her. There is that sonata of Muzio Clementi, Madame, which I will try to remember for you, if you please——"

"All right," said Lavender; "you'll find me in the

next room on the left when you get tired of your music and want a cigar. I think you used to beat me at chess, didn't you?"

"I do not know. We will try once more to-night."

Then Sheila and he went into the drawing-room by themselves; and while she took a seat near the empty fire-place, he opened the piano at once, and sat down. He turned up his cuffs. He took a look at the pedals. He threw back his head, shaking his long brown hair. And then, with a crash like thunder, his two hands struck the keys. He had forgotten all about that sonata—it was a fantasia of his own, based on the airs in "Der Freischütz," that he played; and, as he played, Sheila's poor little piano suffered somewhat. Never before had it been so battered about; and she wished the small chamber were a great hall, to temper the voluminous noise of this opening passage. But presently the music softened. The white, lithe fingers ran lightly over the keys, so that the notes seemed to ripple out like the prattling of a stream; and then again some stately and majestic air, or some joyous burst of song, would break upon this light accompaniment, and lead up to another roar and rumble of noise. It was a very fine performance, doubtless; but what Sheila remarked most was the enthusiasm of the lad. She was to see more of that.

"Now," he said, "that is nothing. It is to get one's fingers accustomed to the keys—you play anything that is loud and rapid. But if you please, Madame, shall I sing you something?"

"Yes, do," said Sheila.

"I will sing for you a little German song, which I believe Jenny Lind used to sing, but I never heard her sing. You know German?"

"Very little indeed."

"This is only the cry of some one, who is far away, about his sweetheart. It is very simple, both in the words and the music."

And he began to sing, in a voice so rich, so tender, and expressive, that Sheila sat amazed and bewildered to hear him. Where had this boy caught such a trick of passion, or was it really a trick that threw into his voice all the pathos of a strong man's love and grief? He had a powerful baritone, of unusual compass, and rare sweetness; but it was not the finely-trained art of his singing, but the passionate abandonment of it, that thrilled Sheila, and indeed brought tears to her eyes. How had this mere lad learned all the yearning and despair of love, that he sang—

"Dir bebt die Brust,
Dir schlägt dies Herz
Du meine Lust!
O du, mein Schmerz!
Nur an den Winden, den Sternen der Höh
Muss ich verkünden mein süsses Weh!"

as though his heart were breaking? When he had finished, he paused for a moment or two before leaving the piano; and then he came over to where Sheila sat. She fancied there was a strange look on his face, as of one who had been really experiencing the wild emotions of which he sang; but he said, in his ordinary careful way of speaking—

"Madame, I am sorry I cannot translate the words for you into English. They are too simple; and they have, what is common in many German songs, a mingling of the pleasure and the sadness of being in love, that would not read natural perhaps in English. When he says to her that she is his greatest delight, and also his greatest grief, it is quite right in the German—but not in the English."

"But where have you learned all these things?" she said to him, talking to him as if he were a mere child, and looking without fear into his handsome boyish face and fine eyes. "Sit down and tell me. That is the song of some one whose sweetheart is far away, you said. But you sang it as if you yourself had some sweetheart far away."

"So I have, Madame," he said, seriously; "when I sing the song, I think of her then, so that I almost cry for her."

"And who is she?" said Sheila, gently. "Is she very far away?"

"I do not know," said the lad, absently. "I do not know who she is. Sometimes I think she is a beautiful woman away at St. Petersburg, singing in the opera-house there. Or I think she has sailed away in a ship from me——"

"But you do not sing about any particular person?" said Sheila, with an innocent wonder appearing in her eyes.

"Oh no, not at all," said the boy; and then he added, with some suddenness, "Do you think, Madame, any fine songs like that, or any fine words, that go to the heart of people, are written about any one person? Oh, no! The man has a great desire in him to say something beautiful, or sad, and he says it—not to one person, but to all the world; and all the world takes it from him as a gift. Sometimes, yes, he will think of one woman, or he will dedicate the music to her, or he will compose it for her wedding, but the feeling in his heart is greater than any that he has for her. Can you believe, Madame, that Mendelssohn wrote the Hochzeitm—the Wedding-March—for any one wedding? No. It was all the marriage-joy of all

the world he put into his music, and everyone knows that. And you hear it at this wedding, at that wedding, but you know it belongs to something far away and more beautiful than the marriage of any one bride with her sweetheart. And if you will pardon me, Madame, for speaking about myself; it is about some one I never knew, who is far more beautiful and precious to me than any one I ever knew, that I try to think when I sing these sad songs, and then I think of her far away, and not likely ever to see me again."

"But some day, you will find that you have met her in real life," Sheila said. "And you will find her far more beautiful and kind to you than anything you dreamed about; and you will try to write your best music to give her. And then, if you should be unhappy, you will find how much worse is the real unhappiness about one you love than the sentiment of a song you can lay aside at any moment."

The lad looked at her.

"What can you know about unhappiness, Madame?" he said, with a frank and gentle simplicity that she liked.

"I?" said Sheila. "When people get married and begin to experience the cares of the world, they must expect to be unhappy sometimes."

"But not you," he said, with some touch of protest in his voice, as if it were impossible the world should deal harshly with so young, and beautiful, and tender a creature. "You can have nothing but enjoyment around you. Everyone must try to please you. You need only condescend to speak to people, and they are grateful to you for a great favour. Perhaps, Madame, you think I am impertinent——"

He stopped and blushed; while Sheila herself, with a little touch of colour, answered him, that she hoped he would always speak to her quite frankly, and then suggested that he might sing once more for her.

"Very well," he said, as he sat down to the piano; "this is not any more a sad song. It is about a young lady who will not let her sweetheart kiss her, except on conditions. You shall hear the conditions, and what he says."

Sheila began to wonder whether this innocent-eyed lad had been imposing on her. The song was acted as well as sung. It consisted chiefly of a dialogue between the two lovers; and the boy, with a wonderful ease and grace and skill, mimicked the shy coquetries of the girl, her fits of petulance and dictation, and the pathetic remonstrances of her companion, his humble entreaties, and his final sullenness, which is only conquered by her sudden and ample consent. "What a rare faculty of artistic representation this precocious boy must have," she thought, "if he really exhibits all those moods, and whims, and tricks of manner without having himself been in the position of the despairing and imploring lover!"

"You were not thinking of the beautiful lady in St. Petersburg when you were singing now," Sheila said, on his coming back to her.

"Oh no," he said carelessly; "that is nothing. You have not to imagine anything. These people, you see them on every stage, in the comedies and farces."

"But that might happen in actual life," said Sheila, still not quite sure about him. "Do you know that many people would think you must have yourself been teased in that way, or you could not imitate it so naturally?"

"I! Oh no, Madame," he said, seriously, "I should not act that way, if I were in love with a woman. If I found her a comedy-actress, liking to make her amusement out of our relations, I should say to her, '*Good evening, Mademoiselle; we have both made a little mistake.*'"

"But you might be so much in love with her that you could not leave her without being very miserable."

"I might be very much in love with her, yes: but I would rather go away, and be miserable, than be humiliated by such a girl. Why do you smile, Madame? Do you think I am vain, or that I am too young to know anything about that? Perhaps both are true; but one cannot help thinking."

"Well," said Sheila, with a grandly maternal air of sympathy and interest, "you must always remember this—that you have something more important to attend to than merely looking out for a beautiful sweetheart. That is the fancy of a foolish girl. You have your profession; and you must become great and famous in that; and then, some day, when you meet this beautiful woman, and ask her to be your wife, she will be bound to do that, and you will confer honour on her as well as secure happiness to yourself. Now, if you were to fall in love with some coquettish girl like her you were singing about, you would have no ambition to become famous; you would lose all interest in everything except her, and she would be able to make you miserable by a single word. When you have made a name for yourself, and got a good many more years, you will be better able to bear anything that happens to you in your love or in your marriage."

"You are very kind to take so much trouble,"

said young Mosenberg, looking up with big, grateful eyes. "Perhaps, Madame, if you are not very busy, during the day, you will let me call in sometimes; and if there is no one here, I will tell you about what I am doing, and play for you, or sing for you, if you please."

"In the afternoons I am always free," she said.

"Do you never go out," he asked.

"Not often. My husband is at his studio most of the day."

The boy looked at her, hesitated for a moment, and then, with a sudden rush of colour to his face—

"You should not stay so much in the house. Will you sometimes go for a little walk with me, Madame, to Kensington Gardens, if you are not busy in the afternoon?"

"Oh, certainly," said Sheila, without a moment's embarrassment. "Do you live near them?"

"No, I live in Sloane-street; but the underground railway brings me here in a very short time."

The mention of Sloane-street gave a twinge to Sheila's heart. Ought she to have been so ready to accept offers of new friendship just as her old friend had been banished from her?

"In Sloane-street? Do you know Mr. Ingram?"

"Oh yes, very well. Do you?"

"He is one of my oldest friends," said Sheila, bravely: she would not acknowledge that their intimacy was a thing of the past.

"He is a very good friend to me—I know that," said young Mosenberg, with a laugh. "He hired a piano, merely because I used to go into his rooms at night; and now he makes me play over all my most difficult music when I go in, and he sits and smokes

a pipe, and pretends to like it. I do not think he does; but I have got to do it all the same; and then, afterwards, I sing for him some songs that I know he likes. Madame, I think I can surprise you."

He went suddenly to the piano, and began to sing, in a very quiet way—

"O soft be thy slumbers, by Tigh-na-linne's waters,
Thy late-wake was sung by MacDiarmid's fair daughters,
But far in Lochaber the true heart was weeping,
Whose hopes are entombed in the grave where thou'rt sleeping."

It was the lament of the young girl whose lover had been separated from her by false reports, and who died before he could get back to Lochaber when the deception was discovered. And the wild, sad air that the girl is supposed to sing seemed so strange with those new chords that this boy-musician gave it, that Sheila sat and listened to it as though it were the sound of the seas about Borva coming to her with a new voice and finding her altered and a stranger.

"I know nearly all of those Highland songs that Mr. Ingram has got," said the lad.

"I did not know he had any," Sheila said.

"Sometimes he tries to sing one himself," said the boy, with a smile, "but he does not sing very well, and he gets vexed with himself in fun, and flings things about the room. But you will sing some of those songs, Madame, and let me hear how they are sung in the North?"

"Some time," said Sheila; "I would rather listen just now to all you can tell me about Mr. Ingram—he is such a very old friend of mine, and I do not know how he lives."

The lad speedily discovered that there was at leas one way of keeping his new and beautiful acquaintance profoundly interested; and, indeed, he went on

talking until Lavender came into the room, in evening dress. It was eleven o'clock; and young Mosenberg started up with a thousand apologies and hopes that he had not detained Mrs. Lavender. No, Mrs. Lavender was not going out; her husband was going round for an hour to a ball that Mrs. Kavanagh was giving, but she preferred to stay at home.

"May I call upon you to-morrow afternoon, Madame?" said the boy, as he was leaving.

"I shall be very glad if you will," Sheila answered.

And as he went along the pavement, young Mosenberg observed to his companion that Mrs. Lavender did not seem to have gone out much, and that it was very good of her to have promised to go with him occasionally into Kensington Gardens.

"Oh, has she?" said Lavender.

"Yes," said the lad, with some surprise.

"You are lucky to be able to get her to leave the house," her husband said; "I can't."

Perhaps he had not tried so much as the words seemed to imply.

CHAPTER III.

Guesses.

"MR. INGRAM," cried young Mosenberg, bursting into the room of his friend, "do you know that I have seen your Princess from the island of the Atlantic? Yes, I met her yesterday, and I went up to the house, and I dined there, and spent all the evening there."

Ingram was not surprised, nor, apparently, much interested. He was cutting open the leaves of a

quarterly review, and a freshly-filled pipe lay on the table beside him. A fire had been lit, more for cheerfulness than warmth: the shutters were shut; there was some whisky on the table; so that this small apartment seemed to have its share of bachelor's comforts.

"Well," said Ingram, quietly, "did you play for her?"

"Yes."

"And sing for her, too?"

"Yes."

"Did you play and sing your very best for her?"

"Yes, I did. But I have not told you half yet. This afternoon I went up; and she went out for a walk with me; and we went down through Kensington Gardens, and all around by the Serpentine——"

"Did she go into that parade of people?" said Ingram, looking up with some surprise.

"No," said the lad, looking rather crestfallen, for he would have liked to have shown off Sheila to some of his friends; "she would not go—she preferred to watch the small boats on the Serpentine; and she was very kind, too, in speaking to the children, and helping them with their boats, although some people stared at her. And what is more than all these things, tomorrow night she comes with me to a concert in the St. James's Hall—yes."

"You are very fortunate," said Ingram, with a smile, for he was well pleased to hear that Sheila had taken a fancy to the boy, and was likely to find his society amusing. "But you have not told me yet what you think of her."

"What I think of her!" said the lad, pausing in a bewildered way, as if he could find no words to express

his opinion of Sheila. And then he said, suddenly, "*I think she is like the Mother of God.*"

"You irreverent young rascal!" said Ingram, lighting his pipe, "how dare you say such a thing?"

"I mean in the pictures—in the tall pictures you see in some churches abroad, far up in a half-darkness. She has the same sweet, compassionate look, and her eyes are sometimes a little sad; and when she speaks to you, you think you have known her for a long time, and that she wishes to be very kind to you. But she is not a Princess at all, as you told me. I expected to find her grand, haughty, wilful, yes; but she is much too friendly for that, and when she laughs, you see she could not sweep about a room, and stare at people. But if she was angry, or proud—perhaps then——"

"See you don't make her angry, then," said Ingram. "Now go and play over all you were practising in the morning. No!—stop a bit. Sit down and tell me something more about your experiences of Shei—of Mrs. Lavender."

Young Mosenberg laughed, and sat down.

"Do you know, Mr. Ingram, that the same thing occurred yesterday night, I was about to sing some more, or I was asking Mrs. Lavender to sing some more—I forget which—but she said to me, '*Not just now. I wish you to sit down and tell me all you know about Mr. Ingram.*'"

"And she no sooner honours you with her confidence than you carry it to everyone!" said Ingram, somewhat fearful of the boy's tongue.

"Oh, as to that," said the lad, delighted to see that his friend was a little embarrassed. "As to that, I believe she is in love with you."

"Mosenberg," said Ingram, with a flash of anger in his dark eyes, "if you were half-a-dozen years older, I would thrash the life out of you. Do you think that is a pretty sort of joke to make about a woman? Don't you know the mischief your gabbling tongue might make; for how is everyone to know that you are talking merely impertinent nonsense?"

"Oh," said the boy, audaciously, "I did not mean anything of the kind you see in comedies or in operas, breaking up marriages, and causing duels! Oh, no. I think she is in love with you as I am in love with her: and I am, ever since yesterday."

"Well, I will say this for you," remarked Ingram, slowly, "that you are the cheekiest young beggar I have the pleasure to know. You are in love with her, are you? A lady admits you to her house, is particularly kind to you, talks to you in confidence, and then you go and tell people that you are in love with her!"

"I did not tell people so," said Mosenberg, flushing under the severity of the reproof; "I told you only, and I thought you would understand what I meant. I should have told Lavender himself just as soon, yes! —only he would not care."

"How do you know?"

"Bah!" said the boy, impatiently. "Cannot one see it? You have a pretty wife—much prettier than anyone you would see at a ball at Mrs. Kavanagh's—and you leave her at home, and you go to the ball to amuse yourself."

This boy, Ingram perceived, was getting to see too clearly how matters stood. He bade him go and play some music, having first admonished him gravely about the necessity of keeping some watch and ward over

his tongue. Then the pipe was re-lit; and a fury of sound arose at the other end of the room.

So Lavender, forgetful of the true-hearted girl who loved him, forgetful of his own generous instincts, forgetful of the future that his fine abilities promised, was still dangling after this alien woman; and Sheila was left at home, with her troubles and piteous yearnings and fancies as her only companions. Once upon a time, Ingram could have gone straight up to him, and admonished him, and driven him to amend his ways. But now that was impossible.

What was still possible? One wild project occurred to him for a moment, but he laughed at it, and dismissed it. It was that he should go boldly to Mrs. Lorraine herself, ask her plainly if she knew what cruel injury she was doing to this young wife, and force her to turn Lavender adrift. But what enterprise of the days of old romance could be compared with this mad proposal? To ride up to a castle, blow a trumpet, and announce that unless a certain lady were released forthwith, death and destruction would begin—all that was simple enough, easy and according to rule; but to go into a lady's drawing-room, without an introduction, and request her to stop a certain flirtation—that was a much more awful undertaking. But Ingram could not altogether dismiss this notion from his head. Mosenberg went on playing no longer his practising-pieces, but all manner of airs which he knew Ingram liked; while the small sallow man with the brown beard lay in his easy-chair, and smoked his pipe, and gazed attentively at his toes on the fender.

"You know Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter, don't you, Mosenberg?" he said, during an interval in the music.

"Not much," said the boy. "They were in England only a little while before I went to Leipsic."

"I should like to know them."

"That is very easy. Mr. Lavender will introduce you to them. Mrs. Lavender said he went there very much."

"What would they do, do you think, if I went up and asked to see them?"

"The servant would ask if it was about beer or coals that you called."

A man will do much for a woman who is his friend; but to be suspected of being a brewer's traveller, to have to push one's way into a strange drawing-room, to have to confront the awful stare of the inmates, and then to have to deliver a message which they will probably consider as the very extreme of audacious and meddling impertinence! The prospect was not pleasant; and yet Ingram, as he sat and thought over it that evening, finally resolved to encounter all these dangers and wounds. He could help Sheila in no other way. He was banished from her house. Perhaps he might induce this American girl to release her captive, and give Lavender back to his own wife. What were a few twinges of one's self-respect, or risks of a humiliating failure, compared with the possibility of befriending Sheila in some small way?

Next morning he went early in to Whitehall; and about one o'clock started off for Holland Park. He wore a tall hat, a black frock-coat, and yellow kid gloves. He went in a hansom, so that the person who opened the door should know that he was not a brewer's traveller. In this wise he reached Mrs. Kavanagh's house, which Lavender had frequently

pointed out to him in passing, about half-past one, and, with some internal tremors, but much outward calmness, went up the broad stone steps.

A small boy in buttons opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Lorraine at home?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

It was the simplest thing in the world. In a couple of seconds he found himself in a big drawing-room; and the youth had taken his card upstairs. Ingram was not very sure whether his success, so far, was due to the hansom, or to his tall hat, or to a silver-headed cane which his grandfather had brought home from India. However, here he was in the house, just like the hero of one of those fine old farces of our youth, who jumps from the street into a strange drawing-room, flirts with the maid, hides behind a screen, confronts the master, and marries his daughter all in half an hour, the most exacting unities of time and place being faithfully observed.

Presently the door was opened, and a young lady, pale and calm and sweet of face, approached him, and not only bowed to him, but held out her hand.

"I have much pleasure in making your acquaintance, Mr. Ingram," she said, gently, and somewhat slowly. "Mr. Lavender has frequently promised to bring you to see us; for he has spoken to us so much about you, that we had begun to think we already knew you. Will you come with me upstairs that I may introduce you to Mamma?"

Ingram had come prepared to state harsh truths bluntly, and was ready to meet any sort of anger or opposition with a perfect frankness of intention. But he certainly had not come prepared to find the smart-tongued and fascinating American widow of whom he

had heard so much, a quiet, self-possessed, and gracious young lady, of singularly winning manners, and clear and resolutely honest eyes. Had Lavender been quite accurate or even conscientious in his garrulous talk about Mrs. Lorraine?

"If you will excuse me," said Ingram, with a smile that had less of embarrassment about it than he could have expected, "I would rather speak to you for a few minutes first. The fact is, I have come on a self-imposed errand; and that must be my apology for—for thrusting myself——"

"I am sure no apology is needed," said the girl. "We have always been expecting to see you. Will you sit down?"

He put his hat and his cane on the table; and as he did so, he recorded a mental resolution not to be led away by the apparent innocence and sweetness of this woman. What a fool he had been, to expect her to appear in the guise of some forward and giggling coquette, as if Frank Lavender, with all his faults, could have suffered anything like coarseness of manners! But was this woman any the less dangerous that she was refined and courteous, and had the speech and bearing of a gentlewoman?

"Mrs. Lorraine," he said, lowering his eyebrows somewhat, "I may as well be frank with you. I have come upon an unpleasant errand—an affair, indeed, which ought to be no business of mine; but sometimes, when you care a little for some one, you don't mind running the risk of being treated as an intermeddler. You know that I know Mrs. Lavender. She is an old friend of mine. She was almost a child when I knew her first; and I still have a sort of no-

tion that she is a child, and that I should look after her, and so—and so——"

She sat quite still. There was no surprise, no alarm, no anger, when Sheila's name was mentioned. She was merely attentive; but now, seeing that he hesitated, she said—

"I do not know what you have to say; but if it is serious, may not I ask Mamma to join us?"

"If you please, no. I would rather speak with you alone, as this matter concerns yourself only. Well, the fact is, I have seen for some time back that Mrs. Lavender is very unhappy; she is left alone; she knows no one in London; perhaps she does not care to join much in those social amusements that her husband enjoys. I say this poor girl is an old friend of mine; I cannot help trying to do something to make her less wretched; and so I have ventured to come to you to see if you could not assist me. Mr. Lavender comes very much to your house; and Sheila is left all by herself; and doubtless she begins to fancy that her husband is neglectful, perhaps indifferent to her, and may get to imagine things that are quite wrong, you know, and that could be explained away by a little kindness on your part."

Was this, then, the fashion in which Jonah had gone up to curse the wickedness of Nineveh? As he had spoken, he had been aware that those sincere, somewhat matter-of-fact, and far from unfriendly eyes that were fixed on him had undergone no change whatever. Here was no vile creature who would start up, with a guilty conscience, to repel the remotest hint of an accusation; and indeed, quite unconsciously to himself, he had been led on to ask for her help. Not that he feared her. Not that he could

not have said the harshest things to her which there was any reason for saying. But somehow there seemed to be no occasion for the utterance of any cruel truths.

The wonder of it was, too, that instead of being wounded, indignant, and angry, as he had expected her to be, she betrayed a very friendly interest in Sheila, as though she herself had nothing whatever to do with the matter.

"You have undertaken a very difficult task, Mr. Ingram," she said, with a smile. "I don't think there are many married ladies in London who have a friend who would do as much for them. And, to tell you the truth, both my mamma and myself have come to the same conclusion as yourself about Mr. Lavender. It is really too bad, the way in which he allows that pretty young thing to remain at home; for I suppose she would go more into society if he were to coax her and persuade her. We have done what we could, in sending her invitations, in calling on her, and in begging Mr. Lavender to bring her with him. But he has always some excuse for her, so that we never see her. And yet I am sure he does not mean to give her pain; for he is very proud of her, and madly extravagant wherever she is concerned, and sometimes he takes sudden fits of trying to please her and be kind to her that are quite odd in their way. Can you tell me what we should do?"

Ingram looked at her for a moment, and said, gravely and slowly—

"Before we talk any more about that, I must clear my conscience. I believe that I have done you a wrong. I came here prepared to accuse you of drawing away Mr. Lavender from his wife, of seeking

amusement and perhaps some social distinction by keeping him continually dangling after you; and I meant to reproach you, or even threaten you, until you promised never to see him again."

A quick flush, partly of shame and partly of annoyance, sprang to the fair and pale face; but she answered, calmly—

"It is perhaps as well that you did not tell me this a few minutes ago. May I ask what has led you to change your opinion of me, if it has changed?"

"Of course it has changed," he said, promptly and emphatically. "I can see that I did you a great injury; and I apologize for it, and beg your forgiveness. But when you ask me what has led me to change my opinion, what am I to say? Your manner, perhaps, more than what you have said, has convinced me that I was wrong."

"Perhaps you are again mistaken," she said, coldly; "you get rapidly to conclusions."

"The reproof is just," he said. "You are quite right. I have made a blunder; there is no mistake about it."

"But do you think it was fair," she said, with some spirit, "do you think it was fair to believe all this harm about a woman you had never seen? Now, listen. A hundred times I have begged Mr. Lavender to be more attentive to his wife—not in these words, of course, but as directly as I could. Mamma has given parties, made arrangements for visits, drives, and all sorts of things, to tempt Mrs. Lavender to come to us, and all in vain. Of course, you can't thrust yourself on anyone like that. Though Mamma and myself like Mrs. Lavender very well, it is asking too much

that we should encounter the humiliation of intermeddling——"

Here she stopped suddenly, with the least show of embarrassment. Then she said, frankly—

"You are an old friend of hers. It is very good of you to have risked so much for the sake of that girl. There are very few gentlemen whom one meets who would do as much."

Ingram could say nothing, and was a little impatient with himself. Was he to be first reproved, and then treated with an indulgent kindness, by a mere girl?

"Mamma," said Mrs. Lorraine, as an elderly lady entered the room, "let me introduce to you Mr. Ingram, whom you must already know. He proposes we should join in some conspiracy to inveigle Mrs. Lavender into society, and make the poor little thing amuse herself."

"Little!" said Mrs. Kavanagh, with a smile; "she is a good deal taller than you are, my dear. But I am afraid, Mr. Ingram, you have undertaken a hopeless task. Will you stay to luncheon, and talk it over with us?"

"I hope you will," said Mrs. Lorraine; and naturally enough he consented.

Luncheon was just ready. As they were going into the room on the opposite side of the hall, the younger lady said to Ingram, in a quiet undertone, but with much indifference of manner—

"You know, if you think I ought to give up Mr. Lavender's acquaintance, I will do so at once. But perhaps that will not be necessary."

So this was the house in which Sheila's husband spent so much of his time; and these were the two

ladies of whom so much had been said and surmised. There were three of Lavender's pictures on the walls of the dining-room; and as Ingram inadvertently glanced at them, Mrs. Lorraine said to him—

"Don't you think it is a pity Mr. Lavender should continue drawing those imaginative sketches of heads? I do not think, myself, that he does himself justice in that way. Some bits of landscape, now, that I have seen, seemed to me to have quite a definite character about them, and promised far more than anything else of his I have seen."

"That is precisely what I think," said Ingram, partly amused and partly annoyed to find that this girl, with her clear grey eyes, her soft and musical voice, and her singular delicacy of manner, had an evil trick of saying the very things he would himself have said, and leaving him with nothing but a helpless "yes."

"I think he ought to have given up his club when he married. Most English gentlemen do that when they marry, do they not?" said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Some," said Ingram. "But a good deal of nonsense is talked about the influence of clubs in that way. It is really absurd to suppose that the size or the shape of a building can alter a man's moral character——"

"It does, though," said Mrs. Lorraine, confidently. "I can tell directly if a gentleman has been accustomed to spend his time in clubs. When he is surprised, or angry, or impatient, you can perceive blanks in his conversation, which in a club, I suppose, would be filled up. Don't you know poor old Colonel Hannen's way of talking, Mamma? This old gentleman, Mr. Ingram, is very fond of speaking to you about

political liberty, and the rights of conscience; and he generally becomes so confused that he gets vexed with himself, and makes odd pauses, as if he were invariably addressing himself in very rude language indeed. Sometimes you would think he was like a railway-engine, going blindly and helplessly on through a thick and choaking mist; and you can see that, if there were no ladies present, he would let off a few crackers—fog-signals, as it were—just to bring himself up a bit, and let people know where he was. Then he will go on again, talking away, until you fancy yourself in a tunnel, with a throbbing noise in your ears, and all the daylight shut out, and you perhaps getting to wish that on the whole you were dead."

"Cecilia!"

"I beg your pardon, Mamma," said the younger lady, with a quiet smile; "you look so surprised, that Mr. Ingram will give me credit for not often erring in that way. You look as though a hare had turned and attacked you."

"That would give most people a fright," said Ingram with a laugh. He was rapidly forgetting the object of his mission. The almost childish softness of voice of this girl, and the perfect composure with which she uttered little sayings showed considerable sharpness of observation, and a keen enjoyment of the grotesque, had an odd sort of fascination for him. He totally forgot that Lavender had been fascinated by it too. If he had been reminded of the fact at this moment, he would have said that the boy had, as usual, got sentimental about a pretty pair of big grey eyes and fine profile, while he, Ingram, was possessed by nothing but a purely intellectual admiration of certain

fine qualities of brightness, sincerity of speech, and womanly shrewdness.

Luncheon, indeed, was over before any mention was made of the Lavenders; and when they returned to that subject, it appeared to Ingram that their relations had in the meantime got to be very friendly, and that they were really discussing this matter as if they formed a little family conclave.

"I have told Mr. Ingram, Mamma," Mrs. Lorraine said, "that so far as I am concerned, I will do whatever he thinks I ought to do. Mr. Lavender has been a friend of ours for some time; and of course he cannot be treated with rudeness or incivility; but if we are wounding the feelings of anyone by asking him to come here—and he certainly has visited us pretty often—why, it would be easy to lessen the number of his calls. Is that what we should do, Mr. Ingram? You would not have us quarrel with him?"

"Especially," said Mrs. Kavanagh, with a smile, "that there is no certainty he will spend more of his time with his wife merely because he spends less of it here. And yet I fancy he is a very good-natured man."

"He *is* very good-natured," said Ingram, with decision. "I have known him for years, and I know that he is exceedingly unselfish, that he would do ridiculously generous things to serve a friend, and that a better-intentioned fellow does not breathe in the world. But he is, at times, I admit, very thoughtless and inconsiderate——"

"That sort of good-nature," said Mrs. Lorraine, in her gentlest voice, "is very good in its way, but rather uncertain. So long as it shines in one direction, it is all right, and quite trustworthy; for you want a hard

brush to brush sunlight off a wall. But when the sunlight shifts, you know——"

"The wall is left in the cold. Well," said Ingram, "I am afraid it is impossible for me to dictate to you what you ought to do. I do not wish to draw you into any interference between husband and wife, or even to let Mr. Lavender know that you think he is not treating Shei—Mrs. Lavender—properly. But if you were to hint to him that he ought to pay some attention to her—that he should not be going everywhere as if he were a young bachelor in chambers; if you would discourage his coming to see you without bringing her also, and so forth—surely he would see what you mean. Perhaps I ask too much of you; but I had intended to ask more. The fact is, Mrs. Kavanagh, I had done your daughter the injustice of supposing——"

"I thought we had agreed to say no more about that," said Mrs. Lorraine, quickly; and Ingram was silent.

Half an hour thereafter he was walking back through Holland Park, through the warm light of an autumn afternoon. The place seemed much changed since he had seen it a couple of hours before. The double curve of big houses had a more friendly and hospitable look; the very air seemed to be more genial and comfortable since he had driven up here in the hansom.

Perhaps Mr. Ingram was at this moment a little more perturbed, pleased, and bewildered than he would have liked to confess. He had discovered a great deal in these two hours; been much surprised and fascinated; and had come away fairly stupefied with the result of his mission. He had, indeed, been suc-

cessful: Lavender would now find a different welcome awaiting him in the house in which he had been spending nearly all his time, to the neglect of his wife. But the fact is, that as Edward Ingram went rapidly over in his own mind everything that had occurred since his entrance into that house; as he anxiously recalled the remarks made to him, the tone and looks accompanying them, and his own replies, it was not of Lavender's affairs alone that he thought. He confessed to himself frankly that he had never yet met any woman who had so surprised him into admiration on their first meeting.

Yet what had she said? Nothing very particular. Was it in the bright intelligence of the grey eyes, that seemed to see everything he meant with an instant quickness, and that seemed to agree with him even before he spoke? He reflected, now that he was in the open air, that he must have persecuted these two women dreadfully. In getting away from Lavender's affairs, they had touched on pictures, books, and what not—on all sorts of topics, indeed, except those which, as Ingram had anticipated, such a creature as Mrs. Lorraine would naturally have found interesting. And he had to confess to himself that he had lectured his two helpless victims most unmercifully. He was quite conscious that he sometimes laid down the law in an authoritative and even sententious manner. On first going into the house, certain things said by Mrs. Lorraine had almost surprised him into a mood of mere acquiescence; but after luncheon he had assumed his ordinary manner of tutor in general to the universe, and had informed those two women, in a distinct fashion, what their opinions ought to be on half the social conundrums of the day.

He now reflected, with much compunction, that this was highly improper. He ought to have asked about flower-shows; and inquired whether the Princess of Wales was looking well of late. Some reference to the last Parisian comedy might have introduced a disquisition on the new greys and greens of the French milliners, with a passing mention made of the price paid for a pair of ponies by a certain Marquise unattached. He had not spoken of one of these things; perhaps he could not, if he had tried. He remembered, with an awful consciousness of guilt, that he had actually discoursed of woman-suffrage, of the public conscience of New York, of the extirpation of the Indians, and a dozen different things, not only taking no heed of any opinions that his audience of two might hold, but insisting on their accepting his opinions as the expression of absolute and incontrovertible truth.

He became more and more dissatisfied with himself. If he could only go back, now, he would be much more wary, more submissive and complaisant, more anxious to please. What right had he to abuse the courtesy and hospitality of these two strangers, and lecture them on the Constitution of their own country? He was annoyed beyond expression that they had listened to him with so much patience.

And yet he could not have seriously offended them; for they had earnestly besought him to dine with them on the following Tuesday evening, to meet an American judge; and, when he had consented, Mrs. Lorraine had written down on a card the date and hour, lest he should forget. He had that card in his pocket: surely he could not have offended them? If he had pursued this series of questions, he might

have gone on to ask himself why he should be so anxious not to have offended these two new friends. He was not ordinarily very sensitive to the opinions that might be formed of him—more especially by persons living out of his own sphere, with whom he was not likely to associate. He did not, indeed, as a general rule, suffer himself to be perturbed about anything; and yet, as he went along the busy thoroughfare at this moment, he was conscious that rarely in his life had he been so ill at ease.

Something now occurred that startled him out of his reverie. Communing with himself, he was staring blankly ahead, taking little note of the people whom he saw. But somehow, in a vague and dream-like way, he seemed to become aware that there was some one in front of him—a long way ahead as yet—whom he knew. He was still thinking of Mrs. Lorraine, and unconsciously postponing the examination of this approaching figure, or rather pair of figures, when, with a sudden start, he found Sheila's sad and earnest eyes fixed upon him. He woke up as from a dream. He saw that young Mosenberg was with her; and naturally the boy would have approached Ingram, and stopped, and spoken. But Ingram paid no attention to him. He was, with a quick pang at his heart, regarding Sheila, with the knowledge that on her rested the cruel decision as to whether she should come forward to him or not. He was not aware that her husband had forbidden her to have any communication with him; yet he had guessed as much, partly from his knowledge of Lavender's impatient disposition, and partly from the glance he caught of her eyes when he woke up from his trance.

Young Mosenberg turned with surprise to his

companion. She was passing on; he did not even see that she had bowed to Ingram, with a face flushed with shame and pain, and with eyes cast down. Ingram, too, was passing on, without even shaking hands with her, or uttering a word. Mosenberg was too bewildered to attempt any protest; he merely followed Sheila, with a conviction that something desperate had occurred, and that he would best consult her feelings by making no reference to it.

But that one look that the girl had directed to her old friend, before she bowed and passed on, had filled him with dismay and despair. It was somehow like the piteous look of a wounded animal, incapable of expressing its pain. All thoughts and fancies of his own little vexations or embarrassments were instantly banished from him; he could only see before him those sad and piteous eyes, full of kindness to him, he thought, and of grief that she should be debarred from speaking to him, and of resignation to her own lot.

Gwdyr House did not get much work out of him that day. He sat in a small room in a back part of the building, looking out on a lonely little square, silent and ruddy with the reflected light of the sunset.

"A hundred Mrs. Lorraines," he was thinking to himself, bitterly enough, "will not save my poor Sheila. She will die of a broken heart. I can see it in her face. And it is I who have done it—from first to last it is I who have done it; and now I can do nothing to help her."

That became the burden and refrain of all his reflections. It was he who had done this frightful thing. It was he who had taken away the young Highland girl—his good Sheila—from her home; and

ruined her life and broken her heart. And he could do nothing to help her.

CHAPTER IV.

Sheila's Stratagem.

"We met Mr. Ingram to-day," said young Mosenberg, ingenuously.

He was dining with Lavender, not at home, but at a certain club in St. James's Street; and either his curiosity was too great, or he had forgotten altogether Ingram's warnings to him that he should hold his tongue.

"Oh, did you?" said Lavender, showing no great interest. "Waiter, some French mustard. What did Ingram say to you?"

The question was asked with much apparent indifference; and the boy stared.

"Well," he said, at length, "I suppose there is some misunderstanding between Mrs. Lavender and Mr. Ingram, for they both saw each other, and they both passed on without speaking; I was very sorry, yes. I thought they were friends. I thought Mr. Ingram knew Mrs. Lavender even before you did; but they did not speak to each other, not one word."

Lavender was in one sense pleased to hear this. He liked to hear that his wife was obedient to him. But, he said to himself, with a sharp twinge of conscience, she was carrying her obedience too far. He had never meant that she should not even speak to her old friend. He would show Sheila that he was not unreasonable. He would talk to her about it as soon as he got home, and in as kindly a way as was possible.

Mosenberg did not play billiards, but they remained late in the billiard-room, Lavender playing pool, and getting out of it rather successfully. He could not speak to Sheila that night; but next morning, before going out, he did.

"Sheila," he said, "Mosenberg told me last night that you met Mr. Ingram, and did not speak to him. Now, I didn't mean anything like that. You must not think me unreasonable. All I want is, that he shall not interfere with our affairs and try to raise some unpleasantness between you and me, such as might arise from the interference of even the kindest of friends. When you meet him outside, or at anyone's house, I hope you will speak to him just as usual." Sheila replied, calmly—

"If I am not allowed to receive Mr. Ingram here, I cannot treat him as a friend elsewhere. I would rather not have friends whom I can only speak to in the streets."

"Very well," said Lavender, wincing under the rebuke, but fancying that she would soon repent her of this resolve. In the meantime, if she would have it so, she should have it so.

So that was an end of this question of Mr. Ingram's interference for the present. But very soon—in a couple of days, indeed—Lavender perceived the change that had been wrought in the house in Holland Park to which he had been accustomed to resort.

"Cecilia," Mrs. Kavanagh had said, on Ingram's leaving, "you must not be rude to Mr. Lavender."

She knew the perfect independence of that gentle young lady, and was rather afraid it might carry her too far.

"Of course I shall not be, Mamma," Mrs. Lorraine

had said. "Did you ever hear of such a courageous act as that man coming up to two strangers and challenging them all on behalf of a girl married to some one else? You know that was the meaning of his visit. He thought I was flirting with Mr. Lavender, and keeping him from his wife. I wonder how many men there are in London who would have walked twenty yards to help in such a matter."

"My dear, he may have been in love with that pretty young lady before she was married."

"Oh no," said the clear-eyed daughter, quietly, but quite confidently. "He would not be so ready to show his interest in her, if that were so. Either he would be modest, and ashamed of his rejection; or vain, and attempt to make a mystery about it."

"Perhaps you are right," said the mother; she seldom found her daughter wrong on such points.

"I am sure I am right, Mamma. He talks about her as fondly, and frequently, and openly, as a man might talk about his own daughter. Besides, you can see he is talking honestly. That man couldn't deceive a child if he were to try. You see everything in his face."

"You seem to have been much interested in him," said Mrs. Kavanagh, with no appearance of sarcasm.

"Well, I don't think I meet such men often, and that is the truth. Do you?"

This was carrying the war into the enemy's country.

"I like him very well," said Mrs. Kavanagh. "I think he is honest. I do not think he dresses very carefully; and he is perhaps too intent on convincing you that his opinions are right."

"Well, for my part," said her daughter, with just the least tinge of warmth in her manner, "I confess I like a man who has opinions, and who is not afraid to say so. I don't find many who have. And as for his dressing, one gets rather tired of men who come to you every evening to impress you with the excellence of their tailor. As if women were to be captured by millinery! Don't we know the value of linen and woollen fabrics?"

"My dear child, you are throwing away your vexation on some one whom I don't know. It isn't Mr. Lavender?"

"Oh dear, no! He is not so silly as that: he dresses well, but there is perfect freedom about his dress. He is too much an artist to sacrifice himself to his clothes."

"I am glad you have a good word for him at last. I think you have been rather hard on him since Mr. Ingram called; and that is the reason I asked you to be careful."

She was quite careful, but as explicit as good manners would allow. Mrs. Lorraine was most particular in asking about Mrs. Lavender, and in expressing her regret that they so seldom saw her.

"She has been brought up in the country, you know," said Lavender, with a smile; "and there the daughters of a house are taught a number of domestic duties that they would consider it a sin to neglect. She would be unhappy if you caused her to neglect them; she would take her pleasure with a bad conscience."

"But she cannot be occupied with them all day."

"My dear Mrs. Lorraine, how often have we discussed the question! And you know you have me at

a disadvantage; for how can I describe to you what those mysterious duties are? I only know that she is pretty nearly always busy with something or other; and in the evening, of course, she is generally too tired to think of going out anywhere."

"Oh, but you must try to get her out. Next Tuesday, now, Judge—— is going to dine with us, and you know how amusing he is. If you have no other engagements, couldn't you bring Mrs. Lavender to dine with us on that evening?"

Now, on former occasions, something of the same sort of invitation had frequently been given; and it was generally answered by Lavender's giving an excuse for his wife, and promising to come himself. What was his astonishment to find Mrs. Lorraine plainly, and most courteously, intimating that the invitation was addressed distinctly to Mr. and Mrs. Lavender as a couple! When he regretted that Mrs. Lavender could not come, she said, quietly—

"Oh, I am so sorry! You would have met an old friend of yours here, as well as the Judge—Mr. Ingram."

Lavender made no further sign of surprise or curiosity than to lift his eyebrows, and say—

"Indeed!"

But when he left the house, certain dark suspicions were troubling his mind. Nothing had been said as to the manner in which Ingram had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter; but there was that in Mrs. Lorraine's manner which convinced Lavender that something had happened. Had Ingram carried his interference to the extent of complaining to them? Had he overcome a repugnance which he had repeatedly admitted, and thrust himself

upon these two people for this very purpose of making him, Lavender, odious and contemptible? Lavender's cheeks burned as he thought of this possibility. Mrs. Lorraine had been most courteous to him; but the longer he dwelt on these vague surmises, the deeper grew his consciousness that he had been turned out of the place, morally if not physically. What was that excess of courtesy but a cloak? If she had meant less, she would have been more careless; and all through the interview he had remarked that, instead of the free warfare of talk that generally went on between them, Mrs. Lorraine was most formally polite, and apparently watchful of her words.

He went home in a passion, which was all the more consuming that it could not be vented on anyone. As Sheila had not spoken to Ingram—as she had even nerved herself to wound him by passing him without notice in the street—she could not be held responsible; and yet he wished that he could have upbraided some one for this mischief that had been done. Should he go straight down to Ingram's lodgings, and have it out with him? At first he was strongly inclined to do so; but wiser counsels prevailed. Ingram had a keen and ready tongue; and a way of saying things that made them rankle afterwards in the memory. Besides, he would go into court with a defective case. He could say nothing, unless Ingram admitted that he had tried to poison the mind of Mrs. Lorraine against him; and, of course, if there was a quarrel, who would be so foolish as to make such an admission? Ingram would laugh at him; would refuse to admit or deny; would increase his anger without affording him an opportunity of revenging himself.

Sheila could see that her husband was troubled,

but could not divine the cause, and had long ago given up any habit of inquiry. He ate his dinner almost in silence, and then said he had to make a call on a friend, and that he would perhaps drop in to the club on his way home, so that she was not to sit up for him. She was not surprised or hurt at the announcement. She was accustomed to spend her evenings alone. She fetched down his cigar-case, put it in his top-coat pocket, and brought him the coat. Then he kissed her, and went out.

But this evening, at least, she had abundant occupation, and that of a sufficiently pleasant kind. For some little time she had been harbouring in her mind a dark and mysterious plot, and she was glad of an opportunity to think it out and arrange its details. Mairi was coming to London; and she had carefully concealed the fact from her husband. A little surprise, of a dramatic sort, was to be prepared for him; with what result, who could tell? All of a sudden Lavender was to be precipitated into the island of Lewis, as nearly as that could be imitated in a house at Notting Hill.

This was Sheila's scheme, and on these lonely evenings she could sit by herself with much satisfaction and ponder over the little points of it and its possible success. Mairi was coming to London under the escort of a worthy Glasgow fishmonger whom Mr. Mackenzie knew. She would arrive after Lavender had left for his studio. Then she and Sheila would set to work to transform the smoking room, that was sometimes called a library, into something resembling the quaint little drawing-room in Sheila's home. Mairi was bringing up a quantity of heather gathered fresh from the rocks beside the White Water; she was

bringing up some peacocks' feathers, too, for the mantelpiece, and two or three big shells; and, best of all, she was to put in her trunk a real and veritable lump of peat, well dried, and easy to light. Then you must know that Sheila had already sketched out the meal that was to be placed on the table, so soon as the room had been done up in the Highland fashion, and this peat lit, so as to send its fragrant smoke abroad. A large salmon was to make its appearance first of all. There would be bottles of beer on the table; also one of those bottles of Norwegian make, filled with whisky. And when Lavender went with wonder into this small room, when he smelt the fragrant peat-smoke—and everyone knows how powerful the sense of smell is in recalling bygone associations—when he saw the smoking salmon, and the bottled beer and the whisky—and when he suddenly found Mairi coming into the room, and saying to him, in her sweet Highland fashion, "And are you ferry well, sir?"—would not his heart warm to the old ways and kindly homeliness of the house in Borva, and would not some glimpse of the happy and half-forgotten time that was now so sadly and strangely remote, cause him to break down that barrier between himself and Sheila that this artificial life in the South had placed there?

So the child dreamed; and was happy in dreaming of it. Sometimes she grew afraid of her project; she had not had much experience in deception, and the mere concealment of Mairi's coming was a hard thing to bear. But surely her husband would take this trick in good part. It was only, after all, a joke. To put a little barbaric splendour of decoration into the quiet little smoking-room; to have a scent of peat-

smoke in the air; and to have a timid, sweet-voiced, pretty Highland girl suddenly make her appearance, with an odour of the sea about her, as it were, and a look of fresh breezes in the colour of her cheeks—what mortal man could find fault with this innocent jest? Sheila's moments of doubt were succeeded by long hours of joyous confidence, in which a happy light shone on her face. She went through the house with a brisk step; she sang to herself as she went; she was kinder than ever to the small children who came into the Square every forenoon, and whose acquaintance she had very speedily made; she gave each of her crossing-sweepers threepence instead of twopence in passing. The servants had never seen her in such good spirits; she was exceptionally generous in presenting them with articles of attire; they might have had half the week in holidays if Mr. Lavender had not to be attended to. A small gentleman of three years of age lived next door, and his acquaintance also she had made, by means of his nurse. At this time his stock of toys, which Sheila had kept carefully renewed, became so big, that he might, with proper management, have set up a stall in the Lowther Arcade.

Just before she left Lewis, her father had called her to him, and said—

"Sheila, I wass wanting to tell you about something. It is not everyone that will care to hef his money given away to poor folk, and it wass many a time I said to myself that when you were married maybe your husband would think you were giving too much money to the poor folk, as you wass doing in Borva. And it iss this fifty pounds I hef got for you, Sheila, in ten bank-notes, and you will take them with you for your own money, that you will not hef any

trouble about giving things to people. And when the fifty pounds will be done, I will send you another fifty pounds, and it will be no difference to me whatever. And if there is any one in Borva you would be for sending money to, there is your own money; for there is many a one would take the money from Sheila Mackenzie that would not be for taking it from an English stranger in London. And when you will send it to them, you will send it to me; and I will tek it to them, and I will tell them that this money is from my Sheila, and from no one else whatever."

This was all the dowry that Sheila carried with her to the South. Mackenzie would willingly have given her half his money, if she would have taken it, or if her husband had desired it; but the old king of Borva had profound and far-reaching schemes in his head about the small fortune he might otherwise have accorded to his daughter. This wealth, such as it was, was to be a magnet to draw this young English gentleman back to the Hebrides. It was all very well for Mr. Lavender to have plenty of money at present; he might not always have it. Then the time would come for Mackenzie to say, "Look here, young man; I can support myself easily and comfortably by my farming and fishing. The money I have saved is at your disposal, so long as you consent to remain in Lewis—in Stornoway, if you please,—elsewhere if you please—only in Lewis. And while you are painting pictures, and making as much money as you can that way, you can have plenty of fishing, and shooting, and amusement: and my guns and boats and rods are all at your service." Mr. Mackenzie considered that no man could resist such an offer.

Sheila, of course, told her husband of the sum of

money she owned; and for a long time it was a standing joke between them. He addressed her with much respect, and was careful to inform her of the fluctuations of the money-market. Sometimes he borrowed a sovereign of her; and never without giving her an I O U, which was faithfully reclaimed. But by and by she perceived that he grew less and less to like the mention of this money. Perhaps it resembled too closely the savings which the over-cautious folks about Borvabost would not entrust to a bank, but kept hidden about their huts in the heel of a stocking. At all events, Sheila saw that her husband did not like her to go to this fund for her charities; and so the fifty pounds that her father had given her lasted a long time. During this period of jubilation, in which she looked forward to touching her husband's heart by an innocent little stratagem, more frequent appeals were made to the drawer in which the treasure was locked up, so that in the end her private dowry was reduced to thirty pounds.

If Ingram could have but taken part in this plan of hers! The only regret that was mingled with her anticipations of a happier future concerned this faithful friend of hers, who seemed to have been cut off from them for ever. And it soon became apparent to her that her husband, so far from inclining to forget the misunderstanding that had arisen between Ingram and himself, seemed to feel increased resentment, insomuch that she was most careful to avoid mentioning his name.

She was soon to meet him, however. Lavender was resolved that he would not appear to have retired from the field, merely because Ingram had entered it. He would go to this dinner on the Tuesday evening, and Sheila would accompany him. First he asked her.

Much as she would have preferred not visiting these particular people, she cheerfully acquiesced; she was not going to be churlish or inconsiderate on the very eve of her dramatic *coup*. Then he went to Mrs. Lorraine, and said he had persuaded Sheila to come with them; and the young American lady and her mamma were good enough to say how glad they were she had come to this decision. They appeared to take it for granted that it was Sheila alone who had declined former invitations.

"Mr. Ingram will be there on Tuesday evening," said Lavender to his wife.

"I was not aware he knew them," said Sheila, remembering, indeed, how scrupulously Ingram had refused to know them.

"He has made their acquaintance for his own purposes, doubtless," said Lavender. "I suppose he will appear in a frock-coat, with a bright blue tie, and he will say 'Sir' to the waiters when he does not understand them."

"I thought you said Mr. Ingram belonged to a very good family," said Sheila, quietly.

"That is so. But each man is responsible for his own manners; and as all the society he sees consists of a cat and some wooden pipes, in a couple of dingy rooms in Sloane Street, you can't expect him not to make an ass of himself."

"I have never seen him make himself ridiculous: I do not think it possible," said Sheila, with a certain precision of speech which Lavender had got to know meant much. "But that is a matter for himself. Perhaps you will tell me what I am to do when I meet him at Mrs. Kavanagh's house."

"Of course, you must meet him as you would any-

one else you know. If you don't wish to speak to him, you need not do so. Saying 'Good evening' costs nothing."

"If he takes me in to dinner?" she asked, calmly.

"Then you must talk to him as you would to any stranger," he said, impatiently. "Ask him if he has been to the opera, and he won't know there is no opera going on. Tell him that town is very full, and he won't know that everybody has left. Say you may meet him again at Mrs. Kavanagh's, and you'll see that he doesn't know they mean to start for the Tyrol in a fortnight. I think you and I must also be settling soon where we mean to go. I don't think we could do better than go to the Tyrol."

She did not answer. It was clear that he had given up all intention of going up to Lewis, for that year at least. But she would not beg him to alter his decision just yet. Mairi was coming; and that experiment of the enchanted room had still to be tried.

As they drove round to Mrs. Kavanagh's house on that Tuesday evening, she thought, with much bitterness of heart, of the possibility of her having to meet Mr. Ingram in the fashion her husband had suggested. Would it not be better, if he did take her in to dinner, to throw herself entirely on his mercy, and ask him not to talk to her at all? She would address herself when there was a chance, to her neighbour on the other side: if she remained silent altogether, no great harm would be done.

When she went into the drawing-room, her first glance round was for him, and he was the first person whom she saw. For, instead of withdrawing into a corner to make one neighbour the victim of his shyness, or concealing his embarrassment in studying the

photographic albums, Mr. Ingram was coolly standing on the hearthrug, with both hands in his trousers' pockets, while he was engaged in giving the American Judge a great deal of authoritative information about America. The Judge was a tall, fair, stout, good-natured man, fond of joking and a good dinner; and he was content at this moment to sit quietly in an easy-chair, with a pleasant smile on his face, and be lectured about his own country by this sallow little man, whom he took to be a Professor of Modern History at some University or other.

Ingram, as soon as he found that Sheila was in the room, relieved her from any doubt as to his intentions. He merely came forward, shook hands with her, said, "How do you do, Mrs. Lavender?" and went back to the Judge. She might have been an acquaintance of yesterday, or a friend of twenty years' standing: no one could tell by his manner. As for Sheila, she parted with his hand reluctantly. She tried to look, too, what she dared not say; but whatever of regret, and kindness, and assurance of friendship was in her eyes, he did not see. He scarcely glanced at her face; he went off at once, and plunged again into the Cincinnati Convention.

Mrs. Kavanagh and Mrs. Lorraine were exceedingly and almost obtrusively kind to her; but she scarcely heard what they said to her. It seemed so strange and so sad to her that her old friend should be standing near her, and she so far removed from him that she dared not go and speak to him. She could not understand it sometimes—everything around her seemed to get confused, until she felt as if she were sinking in a great sea, and could utter but one despairing cry as she saw the light disappear above her head. When

they went in to dinner, she saw that Mr. Ingram's seat was on Mrs. Lorraine's right hand; and although she could hear him speak, as he was almost right opposite to her, it seemed to her that his voice sounded as if it were far away. The man who had taken her in was a tall, brown-whiskered, and faultlessly-dressed person who never spoke; so that she was allowed to sit and listen to the conversation between Mrs. Lorraine and Ingram. They appeared to be on excellent terms. You would have fancied they had known each other for years. And as Sheila sat and saw how pre-occupied and pleased with his companion Mr. Ingram was, perhaps now and again the bitter question arose to her mind, whether this woman, who had taken away her husband, was seeking to take away her friend also. Sheila knew nothing of all that had happened within these past few days. She knew only that she was alone—without either husband or friend; and it seemed to her that this pale American girl had taken both away from her.

Ingram was in one of his happiest moods, and was seeking to prove to Mrs. Lorraine that this present dinner-party ought to be an especially pleasant one. Everybody was going away somewhere; and, of course, she must know that the expectation of travelling was much more delightful than the reality of it. What could surpass the sense of freedom, of power, of hope enjoyed by the happy folks who sat down to an open atlas, and began to sketch out routes for their coming holidays? Where was he going? Oh, he was going to the North. Had Mrs. Lorraine never seen Edinburgh Castle rising out of a grey fog, like the ghost of some great building belonging to the times of Arthurian romance? Had she never seen the northern

twilights, and the awful gloom and wild colours of Loch Coruisk and the Skye hills? There was no holiday-making so healthy, so free from restraint, as that among the far Highland hills and glens, where the clear mountain air, scented with miles and miles of heather, seemed to produce a sort of intoxication of good spirits within one. Then the yachting round the wonderful islands of the West—the rapid runs of a bright forenoon, the shooting of the wild sea-birds, the scrambled dinners in the small cabin, the still nights in the small harbours, with a scent of sea-weed abroad, and the white stars shining down on the trembling water. Yes, he was going yachting this autumn—in about a fortnight he hoped to start. His friend was at present away up Loch Boisdale, in South Uist, and he did not know how to get there except by going to Skye, and taking his chance of some boat going over. Where would they go then? He did not know. Wherever his friend liked. It would be enough for him if they kept moving about, seeing the strange sights of the sea, and the air, and the lonely shores of those northern islands. Perhaps they might even try to reach St. Kilda——

"Oh, Mr. Ingram, won't you go and see my papa!"

The cry that suddenly reached him was like the cry of a broken heart. He started as from a trance, and found Sheila regarding him with a piteous appeal in her face; she had been listening intently to all he had said.

"Oh yes, Sheila," he said, kindly, and quite forgetting that he was speaking to her before strangers; "of course I must go and see your papa, if we are any way near the Lewis. Perhaps you may be there then?"

"No," said Sheila, looking down.

"Won't you go to the Highlands this autumn?" Mrs. Lorraine asked, in a friendly way.

"No," said Sheila, in a measured voice, as she looked her enemy fair in the face; "I think we are going to the Tyrol."

If the child had only known what occurred to Mrs. Lorraine's mind at this moment! Not a triumphant sense of Lavender's infatuation, as Sheila probably fancied; but a very definite resolution that, if Frank Lavender went to the Tyrol, it was not with either her or her mother he should go.

"Mrs. Lavender's father is an old friend of mine," said Ingram, loud enough for all to hear; "and hospitable as all Highlanders are, I have never met his equal in that way, and I have tried his patience a good many times. What do you think, Mrs. Lorraine, of a man who would give up his best gun to you, even though you couldn't shoot a bit, and he particularly proud of his shooting? And so, if you lived with him for a month or six months—each day the best of everything for you, the second-best for your friend, the worst for himself. Wasn't it so, Lavender?"

It was a direct challenge sent across the table; and Sheila's heart beat quick lest her husband should say something ungracious.

"Yes, certainly," said Lavender, with a readiness that pleased Sheila; "I at least have no right to complain of his hospitality."

"Your papa is a very handsome man," said Mrs. Lorraine to Sheila, bringing the conversation back to their own end of the table "I have seen few finer heads than that drawing you have. Mr. Lavender did that, did he not? Why has he never done one of you?"

"He is too busy, I think, just now," Sheila said;

perhaps not knowing that from Mrs. Lorraine's waist-belt at that moment depended a fan which might have given evidence as to the extreme scarcity of time under which Lavender was supposed to labour.

"He has a splendid head," said Ingram. "Did you know that he is called the King of Borva up there?"

"I have heard him being called the King of Thule," said Mrs. Lorraine, turning with a smile to Sheila, "and of his daughter being styled a Princess. Do you know the ballad of the King of Thule in 'Faust,' Mrs. Lavender?"

"In the opera?—yes," said Sheila.

"Will you sing it for us after dinner?"

"If you like."

The promise was fulfilled, in a fashion. The notion that Mr. Ingram was about to go away up to Lewis, to the people who knew her, and to her father's house, with no possible answer to the questions which would certainly be showered upon him as to why she had not come also, troubled Sheila deeply. The ladies went into the drawing-room, and Mrs. Lorraine got out the song. Sheila sat down to the piano, thinking far more of that small stone house at Borva than of the King of Thule's castle overlooking the sea; and yet somehow the first lines of the song, though she knew them well enough, sent a pang to her heart as she glanced at them. She touched the first notes of the accompaniment, and she looked at the words again.

"Over the sea in Thulè of old
Reigned a King who was true hearted,
Who in remembrance of one departed—"

A mist came over her eyes. Was she the one who had departed, leaving the old King in his desolate house by the sea, where he could only think of her

as he sat in his solitary chamber, with the night winds howling round the shore outside? When her birthday had come round, she knew that he must have silently drunk to her, though not out of a beaker of gold. And now, when mere friends and acquaintances were free to speed away to the North, and get a welcome from the folks in Borva, and listen to the Atlantic waves dashing lightly in among the rocks, her hope of getting thither had almost died out. Among such people as landed on Stornoway quay from the big *Clansman*, her father would seek one face, and seek it in vain. And Duncan, and Scarlett, and even John the Piper—all the well-remembered folks who lived far away across the Minch—they would ask why Miss Sheila was never coming back. Mrs. Lorraine had been standing aside from the piano. Noticing that Sheila had played the introduction to the song twice over, in an undetermined manner, she came forward a step or two, and pretended to be looking at the music. Tears were running down Sheila's face. Mrs. Lorraine put her hand on the girl's shoulder, and sheltered her from observation, and said aloud—

"You have it in a different key, have you not? Pray don't sing it. Sing something else. Do you know any of Gounod's sacred songs? Let me see if we can find anything for you in this volume."

They were a long time finding anything in that volume. When they did find it, behold! it was one of Mrs. Lorraine's songs, and that young lady said, if Mrs. Lavender would only allow herself to be superseded for a few minutes——And so Sheila walked, with her head down, to the conservatory, which was at the other end of the piano; and Mrs. Lorraine not only sung this French song, but sang every one of the

verses; and at the end of it she had quite forgotten that Sheila had promised to sing.

"You are very sensitive," she said to Sheila, coming into the conservatory.

"I am very stupid," Sheila said, with her face burning. "But it is a long time since I will see the Highlands—and Mr. Ingram was talking of the places I know—and—and so——"

"I understand well enough," said Mrs. Lorraine, tenderly, as if Sheila were a mere child in her hands. "But you must not get your eyes red. You have to sing some of those Highland songs for us yet, when the gentlemen come in. Come up to my room, and I will make your eyes all right. Oh, do not be afraid! I shall not bring you down like Lady Leveret. Did you ever see anything like that woman's face to-night? It reminds me of the window of an oil-and-colour shop: I wonder she does not catch flies with her cheeks."

So all the people, Sheila learned that night, were going away from London; and soon she and her husband would join in the general stampede of the very last dwellers in town. But Mairi? What was to become of her after that little plot had been played out? Sheila could not leave Mairi to see London by herself; she had been enjoying beforehand the delight of taking the young girl about, and watching the wonder of her eyes. Nor could she fairly postpone Mairi's visit; and Mairi was coming up in another couple of days.

On the morning on which the visitor from the far Hebrides was to make her appearance in London, Sheila felt conscious of a great hypocrisy in bidding good-bye to her husband. On some excuse or other,

she had had breakfast ordered early; and he found himself ready at half-past nine to go out for the day.

"Frank," she said, "will you come in to lunch at two?"

"Why?" he asked: he did not often have luncheon at home.

"I will go into the Park with you in the afternoon, if you like," she said: all the scene had been diligently rehearsed, on one side, before.

Lavender was a little surprised, but he was in an amiable mood.

"All right," he said. "Have something with olives in it. Two sharp."

With that he went out; and Sheila, with a wild commotion at her heart, saw him walk away through the Square. She was afraid Mairi might have arrived before he left. And, indeed, he had not gone above a few minutes when a four-wheeler drove up, and an elderly man got out and waited for the timid-faced girl inside to alight. With a rush like that of a startled deer, Sheila was down the stairs, along the hall, and on the pavement; and it was, "Oh, Mairi! and have you come at last? And are you very well? And how are all the people in Borva? And, Mr. M'Alpine, how are you, and will you come into the house?"

Certainly, that was a strange sight for a decorous London square; the mistress of a house, a young girl with bare head, coming out on the pavement to shake hands in a frantic fashion with a young maid-servant and an elderly man whose clothes had been pretty well tanned by sunlight and sea-water. And Sheila would herself help to carry Mairi's luggage in. And she would take no denial from Mr. M'Alpine, whose

luggage was also carried in. And she would herself pay the cabman, as strangers did not know about these things: Sheila's knowledge being exhibited by her hastily giving the man five shillings for driving from Euston Station. And there was breakfast waiting for them both, as soon as Mairi could get her face washed; and would Mr. M'Alpine have a glass of whisky after the night's travelling?—and it was very good whisky whatever, as it had come all the way from Stornoway. Mr. M'Alpine was nothing loth.

"And wass you pretty well, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi, looking timidly and hastily up, and forgetting altogether that Sheila had another name now. "It will be a great thing for me to go back to sa Lewis, and tell them I wass seeing you, and you wass looking so well. And I will be thinking I wass neffer coming to anyone I knew any more! and it is a great fright I hef had since we came away from sa Lewis; and I wass thinking we would neffer find you among all sa people and so far away across sa sea and sa land. Eh——!" The girl stopped in astonishment. Her eyes had wandered up to a portrait on the walls; and here, in this very room, after she had travelled over all this great distance, apparently leaving behind her everything but the memory of her home, was Mr. Mackenzie himself, looking at her from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"You must have seen that picture in Borva, Mairi," Sheila said. "Now come with me, like a good girl, and get yourself ready for breakfast. Do you know, Mairi, it does my heart good to hear you talk again. I don't think I shall be able to let you go back to the Lewis."

"But you hef changed ferry much in your way

of speaking, Miss—Mrs. Lavender," said Mairi, with an effort. "You will speak just like sa English now."

"The English don't say so," replied Sheila, with a smile, leading the way upstairs.

Mr. M'Alpine had his business to attend to; but, being a sensible man, he took advantage of the profuse breakfast placed before him. Mairi was a little too frightened, and nervous, and happy to eat much; but Mr. M'Alpine was an old traveller, not to be put out by the mere meeting of two girls. He listened in a grave and complacent manner to the rapid questions and answers of Mairi and her hostess; but he himself was too busy to join in the conversation much. At the end of breakfast, he accepted, after a little pressing, half a glass of whisky; and then, much comforted and in a thoroughly good humour with himself and the world, got his luggage out again and went on his way towards a certain inn in High Holborn.

"Ay, and where does the Queen live, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi. She had been looking at the furniture in Sheila's house, and wondering if the Queen lived in a place still more beautiful than this.

"A long way from here."

"And it iss no wonder," said Mairi, "she will neffer hef been in sa Lewis. I wass neffer thinking the world wass so big, and it wass many a time since me and Mr. M'Alpine hef come away from Styornoway, I wass thinking it wass too far for me effer to get back again. But it is many a one will say to me, before I hef left the Lewis, that I wass not to come home unless you wass coming too, and I wass to bring you back with me, Miss Sheila. And where is Bras, Miss Sheila?"

"You will see him by and by. He is out in the garden now." She said 'gyarden' without knowing it.

"And will he understood the Gaelic yet?"

"Oh yes," Sheila said, "and he is sure to remember you."

There was no mistake about that. When Mairi went into the back-garden, the demonstrations of delight on the part of the great deerhound were as pronounced as his dignity and gravity would allow. And Mairi fairly fell upon his neck and kissed him, and addressed to him a hundred endearing phrases in Gaelic, every word of which it was quite obvious that the dog understood. London was already beginning to be less terrible to her. She had met and talked with Sheila. Here was Bras. A portrait of the King of Borva was hung up inside, and all round the rooms were articles which she had known in the North, before Sheila had married and brought them away into this strange land.

"You have never asked after my husband, Mairi," said Sheila, thinking she would confuse the girl.

But Mairi was not confused. Probably she had been fancying that Mr. Lavender was down at the shore, or had gone out fishing, or something of that sort, and would return soon enough. It was Sheila, not he, whom she was concerned about. Indeed, Mairi had caught up a little of that jealousy of Lavender which was rife among the Borva folks. They would speak no ill of Mr. Lavender. The young gentleman whom Miss Sheila had chosen had by that very fact a claim upon their respect. Mr. Mackenzie's son-in-law was a person of importance. And yet, in their secret hearts, they bore a grudge against him. What right had he to come away up to the North and carry off the very pride of the island? Were English girls not good enough for him that he must needs come up

and take away Sheila Mackenzie, and keep her there in the South so that her friends and acquaintances saw no more of her? Before the marriage, Mairi had a great liking and admiration for Mr. Lavender. She was so pleased to see Miss Sheila pleased that she approved of the young man, and thanked him in her heart for making her cousin and mistress so obviously happy. Perhaps, indeed, Mairi managed to fall in love with him a little bit herself, merely by force of example and through sympathy with Sheila; and she was rapidly forming very good opinions of the English race, and their ways, and their looks. But when Lavender took away Sheila from Borva, a change came over Mairi's sentiments. She gradually fell in with the current opinions of the island—that it was a great pity Sheila had not married young Mr. MacIntyre, of Sutherland, or some who would have allowed her to remain among her own people. Mairi began to think that the English, though they were handsome, and good-natured, and free with their money, were on the whole a selfish race, inconsiderate, and forgetful of promises. She began to dislike the English, and wished they would stay in their own country, and not interfere with other people.

"I hope he is ferry well," said Mairi, dutifully: she could at least say that honestly.

"You will see him at two o'clock. He is coming in to luncheon; and he does not know you are here; and you are to be a great surprise to him, Mairi. And there is to be a greater surprise still; for we are going to make one of the rooms into the drawing-room at home; and you must open your boxes, and bring me down the heather and the peat, Mairi, and the two bottles; and then, you know, when the salmon is on

the table, and the whisky, and the beer, and Bras lying on the hearthrug, and the peat-smoke all through the room, then you will come in and shake hands with him, and he will think he is in Borva again."

Mairi was a little puzzled. She did not understand the intention of this strange thing. But she went and fetched the materials she had brought with her from Lewis, and Sheila and Mairi set to work.

It was a pleasant enough occupation for this bright forenoon, and Sheila, as she heard Mairi's sweet Highland speech, and as she brought from all parts of the house the curiosities sent her from the Hebrides, would almost have fancied she was superintending a "cleaning" of that museum-like little drawing-room at Borva. Skins of foxes, seals, and deer, stuffed eagles and strange fishes, masses of coral and wonderful carvings in wood brought from abroad, shells of every size from every clime—all these were brought together into Frank Lavender's smoking-room. The ordinary ornaments of the mantelpiece gave way to fanciful arrangements of peacocks' feathers. Fresh-blown ling and the beautiful spikes of the bell-heather formed the staple of the decorations, and Mairi had brought enough to adorn an assembly-room.

"That is like the Lewis people," Sheila said, with a laugh—she had not been in as happy a mood for many a day. "I asked you to bring one peat, and of course you brought two. Tell the truth, Mairi; could you have forced yourself to bring one peat?"

"I wass thinking it was safer to bring sa two," replied Mairi, blushing all over the fair and pretty face.

And, indeed, there being two peats, Sheila thought she might as well try an experiment with one. She crumbled down some pieces, put them on a plate, lit

them, and placed the plate outside the open window, on the sill. Presently a new, sweet, half-forgotten fragrance came floating in; and Sheila almost forgot the success of the experiment in the half-delighted, half-sad reminiscences called up by the scent of the peat. Mairi failed to see how anyone could wilfully smoke a house—anyone, that is to say, who did not save the smoke for his thatch. And who was so particular as Sheila had been about having the clothes come in from the washing dried, so that they should not retain this very odour that seemed now to delight her?

At last the room was finished, and Sheila contemplated it with much satisfaction. The table was laid, and on the white cloth stood the bottles most familiar to Borva. The peat-smoke still lingered in the air; she could not have wished anything to be better.

Then she went off to look after luncheon, and Mairi was permitted to go down and explore the mysteries of the kitchen. The servants were not accustomed to this interference and oversight, and might have resented it, only that Sheila had proved a very good mistress to them, and had shown, too, that she would have her own way when she wanted it. Suddenly, as Sheila was explaining to Mairi the use of some particular piece of mechanism, she heard a sound that made her heart jump. It was now but half-past one: and yet that was surely her husband's foot in the hall. For a moment she was too bewildered to know what to do. She heard him go straight into the very room she had been decorating, the door of which she had left open. Then, as she went upstairs, with her heart still beating fast, the first thing that met her eye was a tartan shawl belonging to Mairi that had been accidentally left in the passage. Her husband must have seen it.

"Sheila, what nonsense is this?" he said.

He was evidently in a hurry; and yet she could not answer, her heart was throbbing too quickly.

"Look here," he said, "I wish you'd give up this grotto-making till to-morrow. Mrs. Kavanagh, Mrs. Lorraine, and Lord Arthur Redmond are coming in to luncheon at two. I suppose you can get something decent for them. What is the matter? What is the meaning of all this?"

And then his eye rested on the tartan shawl, which he had really not noticed before.

"Who is in the house?" he said, "Have you asked some washerwoman to lunch?"

Sheila managed at last to say—

"It is Mairi come from Stornoway. I was thinking you would be surprised to see her when you came in——"

"And these preparations are for her!".

Sheila said nothing: there was that in the tone of her husband's voice which was gradually bringing her to herself, and giving her quite sufficient firmness.

"And now that this girl has come up, I suppose you mean to introduce her to all your friends; and I suppose you expect those people who are coming in half an hour to sit down at table with a kitchen-maid?"

"Mairi," said Sheila, standing quite erect, but with her eyes cast down, "is my cousin."

"Your cousin! Don't be ridiculous, Sheila. You know very well that Mairi is nothing more nor less than a scullery-maid, and I suppose you mean to take her out of the kitchen, and introduce her to people, and expect them to sit down at table with them. Is not that so?"

She did not answer, and he went on, impatiently, "Why was I not told that this girl was coming to stay

at my house? Surely I have some right to know what guests you invite, that I may be able at least to ask my friends not to come near the house while they are in it."

"That I did not tell you before—yes, that was a pity," said Sheila, sadly and calmly. "But it will be no trouble to you. When Mrs. Lorraine comes up at two o'clock, there will be luncheon for her and for her friends. She will not have to sit down with any of my relations, or with me, for if they are not fit to meet her, I am not; and it is not any great matter that I shall not meet her at two o'clock."

There was no passion of any sort in the measured and sad voice, nor in the somewhat pale face and downcast eyes. Perhaps it was this composure that deceived Frank Lavender; at all events, he turned and walked out of the house, satisfied that he would not have to introduce this Highland cousin to his friends, and just as certain that Sheila would repent of her resolve, and appear in the dining-room as usual.

Sheila went downstairs to the kitchen, where Mairi still stood awaiting her. She gave orders to one of the servants about having luncheon laid in the dining-room at two, and then she bade Mairi follow her upstairs.

"Mairi," she said, when they were alone, "I want you to put your things in your trunk at once—in five minutes if you can—I shall be waiting for you."

"Miss Sheila!" cried the girl, looking up to her friend's face with a sudden fright seizing her heart. "What is the matter with you? You are going to die!"

"There is nothing the matter, Mairi. I am going away."

She uttered the words placidly; but there was a pained look about the lips that could not be con-

cealed, and her face, unknown to herself, had the whiteness of despair in it.

"Going away!" said Mairi, in a bewildered way. "Where are you going, Miss Sheila?"

"I will tell you by and by. Get your trunk ready, Mairi. You are keeping me waiting."

Then she called for a servant, who was sent for a cab; and by the time the vehicle appeared, Mairi was ready to get into it, and her trunk was put on the top. Then, clad in the rough blue dress that she used to wear in Borva, and with no appearance of haste or fear in the calm and death-like face, Sheila came out from her husband's house, and found herself alone in the world. There were two little girls, the daughters of a neighbour, passing by at the time; she patted them on the head, and bade them good-morning. Could she recollect, five minutes thereafter, having seen them? There was a strange and distant look in her eyes. She got into the cab, and sat down by Mairi, and then took the girl's hand.

"I am sorry to take you away, Mairi," she said; but she was apparently not thinking of Mairi, nor of the house she was leaving, nor yet of the vehicle in which she was so strangely placed. Was she thinking of a certain wild and wet day in the far Hebrides, when a young bride stood on the decks of a great vessel, and saw the home of her childhood and the friends of her youth fade back into the desolate waste of the sea? Perhaps there may have been some unconscious influence in this picture to direct her movements at this moment, for definite resolves she had none. When Mairi told her that the cabman wanted to know whither he was to drive, she merely answered, "Oh yes, Mairi, we will go to the station;" and Mairi

added, addressing the man, "It was the Euston Station." Then they drove away.

"Are you going home?" said the young girl, looking up with a strange foreboding and sinking of the heart to the pale face and distant eyes. "Are you going home, Miss Sheila?"

"Oh yes, we are going home, Mairi," was the answer she got; but the tone in which it was uttered filled her mind with doubt and something like despair.

CHAPTER V.

A new Day breaks.

WAS this, then, the end of the fair and beautiful romance that had sprung up and blossomed so hopefully in the remote and bleak island, amid the silence of the hills and moors and the wild twilights of the north, and set round about, as it were, by the cold sea-winds and the sound of the Atlantic waves? Who could have fancied, looking at those two young folks as they wandered about the shores of the island, as they sailed on the still moonlight nights through the channels of Loch Roag, or as they sang together of an evening in the little parlour of the house at Borvabost, that all the delight and wonder of life then apparently opening out before them was so soon and so suddenly to collapse, leaving them in outer darkness and despair? All their difficulties had been got over. From one side and from another they had received generous help, friendly advice, self-sacrifice to start them on a path that seemed to be strewn with sweet-smelling flowers. And here was the end—a wretched girl, blinded and bewildered, flying from her husband's house and seeking refuge in the great world of London, careless whither she went.

Whose was the fault? Which of them had been mistaken up there in the North, laying the way open for a bitter disappointment? Or had either of them failed to carry out that unwritten contract entered into in the halcyon period of courtship, by which two young people promise to be and remain to each other all that they then appear?

Lavender, at least, had no right to complain. If the real Sheila turned out to be something different to the Sheila of his fancy, he had been abundantly warned that such would be the case. He had even accepted it as probable, and said that as the Sheila whom he might come to know must doubtless be better than the Sheila whom he had imagined, there was little danger in store for either. He would love the true Sheila even better than the creature of his brain. Had he done so? He found beside him this proud and sensitive Highland girl, full of generous impulses that craved for the practical work of helping other people, longing, with the desire of a caged bird, for the free winds and light of heaven, the sight of hills and the sound of seas; and he could not understand why she should not conform to the usages of city life. He was disappointed that she did not do so. The imaginative Sheila, who was to appear as a wonderful Sea-princess in London drawing-rooms, had disappeared now; and the real Sheila, who did not care to go with him into that society which he loved or affected to love, he had not learned to know.

And had she been mistaken in her estimate of Frank Lavender's character? At the very moment of her leaving her husband's house, if she had been asked the question, she would have turned and proudly answered, "No!" She had been disappointed—so

grievously disappointed that her heart seemed to be breaking over it; but the manner in which Frank Lavender had fallen away from the promise he had given was due, not to himself, but to the influence of the society around him. Of that she was quite assured. He had shown himself careless, indifferent, inconsiderate to the verge of cruelty; but he was not, she had convinced herself, consciously cruel, nor yet selfish, nor radically bad-hearted in any way. In her opinion, at least, he was courageously sincere, to the verge of shocking people who mistook his frankness for impudence. He was recklessly generous; he would have given the coat off his back to a beggar, at the instigation of a sudden impulse, provided he could have got into a cab before any of his friends saw him; he had rare abilities, and at times wildly ambitious dreams, not of his own glorification, but of what he would do to celebrate the beauty and the graces of the Princess whom he fancied he had married. It may seem hard of belief that this man, judging him by his actions at this time, could have had anything of thorough self-forgetfulness and manliness in his nature. But when things were at their very worst—when he appeared to the world as a self-indulgent idler, careless of a noble woman's unbounded love—when his indifference, or worse, had actually driven from his house a young wife who had especial claims on his forbearance and consideration—there were two people who still believed in Frank Lavender. They were Sheila Mackenzie and Edward Ingram; and a man's wife and his oldest friend generally know something about his real nature, its besetting temptations, its weakness, its strength, and its possibilities.

Of course Ingram was speedily made aware of all

that had happened. Lavender went home at the appointed hour to luncheon, accompanied by his three acquaintances. He had met them accidentally in the forenoon; and as Mrs. Lorraine was most particular in her inquiries about Sheila, he thought he could not do better than ask her there and then, with her mother and Lord Arthur, to have luncheon at two. What followed on his carrying the announcement to Sheila we know. He left the house, taking it for granted that there would be no trouble when he returned. Perhaps he reproached himself for having spoken so sharply; but Sheila was really very thoughtless in such matters. At two o'clock everything would be right. Sheila must see how it would be impossible to introduce a young Highland serving-maid to two fastidious ladies and the son of a great Conservative peer.

Lavender met his three friends once more and walked up to the house with them, letting them in, indeed, with his own latch-key. Passing the dining-room, he saw that the table was laid there. This was well. Sheila had been reasonable.

They went upstairs to the drawing-room. Sheila was not there. Lavender rang the bell, and bade the servant tell her mistress she was wanted.

"Mrs. Lavender has gone out, sir," said the servant.

"Oh, indeed," he said, taking the matter quite coolly. "When?"

"A quarter of an hour ago, sir. She went out with the—the young lady who came this morning."

"Very well. Let me know when luncheon is ready."

Lavender turned to his guests, feeling a little awkward, but appearing to treat the matter in a light and humorous way. He imagined that Sheila, resenting what he had said, had resolved to take Mairi away,

and find her lodgings elsewhere. Perhaps that might be done in time to let Sheila come back to receive his guests.

Sheila did not appear, however, and luncheon was announced.

"I suppose we may as well go down," said Lavender, with a shrug of his shoulders. "It is impossible to say when she may come back. She is such a good-hearted creature that she would never think of herself or her own affairs in looking after this girl from Lewis."

They went down stairs, and took their places at the table.

"For my part," said Mrs. Lorraine, "I think it is very unkind not to wait for poor Mrs. Lavender. She may come in dreadfully tired and hungry."

"But that would not vex her so much as the notion that you had waited on her account," said Sheila's husband, with a smile; and Mrs. Lorraine was pleased to hear him sometimes speak in a kindly way of the Highland girl whom he had married.

Lavender's guests were going somewhere after luncheon, and he had half promised to go with them, Mrs. Lorraine stipulating that Sheila should be induced to come also. But when luncheon was over, and Sheila had not appeared, he changed his intention. He would remain at home. He saw his three friends depart, and went into the study, and lit a cigar.

How odd the place seemed! Sheila had left no instructions about the removal of those barbaric decorations she had placed in the chamber; and here, around him, seemed to be the walls of the old-fashioned little room at Borvabost, with its big shells, its peacocks' feathers, its skins, and stuffed fish, and masses of

crimson bell-heather. Was there not, too, an odour of peat-smoke in the air?—and then his eye caught sight of the plate that still stood on the window-sill, with the ashes of the burned peat on it.

"The odd child she is!" he thought, with a smile, "to go playing at grotto-making, and trying to fancy she was up in Lewis again. I suppose she would like to let her hair down again, and take off her shoes and stockings, and go wading along the sand in search of shell-fish."

And then, somehow, his fancies went back to the old time when he had first seen and admired her wild ways, her fearless occupations by sea and shore, and the delight of active work that shone on her bright face and in her beautiful eyes. How lithe and handsome her figure used to be, in that blue dress, when she stood in the middle of the boat, her head bent back, her arms upstretched and pulling at some rope or other, and all the fine colour of exertion in the bloom of her cheeks! Then the pride with which she saw her little vessel cutting through the water—how she tightened her lips with a joyous determination as the sheets were hauled close and the gunwale of the small boat heeled over so that it almost touched the hissing and gurgling foam—how she laughed at Duncan's anxiety as she rounded some rocky point, and sent the boat spinning into the clear and smooth waters of the bay! Perhaps, after all, it was too bad to keep the poor child so long shut up in a city. She was evidently longing for a breath of sea-air, and for some brief dash of that brisk, fearless life on the sea-coast that she used to love. It was a happy life, after all; and he had himself enjoyed it, when his hands and face got browned by the sun, when he grew to

wonder how any human being could wear black garments and drink foreign wines, and smoke cigars at eighteenpence apiece, so long as frieze coats, whisky, and a briar-root pipe were procurable. How one slept up in that remote island, after all the laughing, and drinking, and singing of the evening were over! How sharp was the monition of hunger when the keen sea-air blew about your face on issuing out in the morning; and how fresh, and cool, and sweet was that early breeze, with the scent of Sheila's flowers in it! Then the long, bright day at the river-side, with the black pools rippling in the wind, and in the silence the rapid whistle of the silken line through the air, and now and again the "blob" of a big salmon rising to a fly farther down the pool. Where was there any rest like the rest of the mid-day luncheon, when Duncan had put the big fish, wrapped in rushes, under the shadow of the nearest rock, when you sat down on the warm heather, and lit your pipe, and began to inquire where you had been bitten on hands and neck by the ferocious "clegs" while you were too busy in playing a fifteen pounder to care. Then, perhaps, as you were sitting there in the warm sunlight, with all the fresh scents of the moorland around, you would hear a light footstep on the soft moss; and, turning round, here was Sheila herself, with a bright look in her pretty eyes, and a half blush on her cheek, and a friendly inquiry as to the way the fish had been behaving. Then the beautiful, strange, cool evenings on the shores of Loch Roag, with the wild, clear light still shining in the northern heavens, and the sound of the waves getting to be lonely and distant; or, still later, out in Sheila's boat, with the great yellow moon rising up over Suainabhal and Mealasabhal into a

lambent vault of violet sky; a pathway of quivering gold lying across the loch; a mild radiance glittering here and there on the spars of the small vessel, and, out there, the great Atlantic lying still and distant as in a dream. As he sat in this little room and thought of all these things, he grew to think he had not acted quite fairly to Sheila. She was so fond of that beautiful island life; and she had not even visited the Lewis since her marriage. She should go now. He would abandon that trip to the Tyrol; and as soon as arrangements could be made, they would together start for the north, and some day soon find themselves going up the steep shore to Sheila's home, with the old King of Borva standing in the porch of the house, and endeavouring to conceal his nervousness by swearing at Duncan's method of carrying the luggage.

Had not Sheila's stratagem succeeded? That pretty trick of hers, in decorating the room so as to resemble the house at Borvabost, had done all that she could have desired. But where was she?

Lavender rose hastily, and looked at his watch. Then he rang the bell, and a servant appeared.

"Did not Mrs. Lavender say when she would return?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"You don't know where she went?"

"No, sir. The young lady's luggage was put into the cab, and they drove away without leaving any message."

He scarcely dared confess to himself what fears began to assail him. He went upstairs to Sheila's room, and there everything appeared to be in its usual place, even to the smallest articles on the dressing-table. They were all there, except one. That was a

locket, too large and clumsy to be worn, which someone had given her years before she left Lewis, and in which her father's portrait had been somewhat rudely set. Just after their marriage, Lavender had taken out this portrait, touched it up a bit into something of a better likeness, and put it back; and then she had persuaded him to have a photograph of himself coloured and placed on the opposite side. This locket, open and showing both portraits, she had fixed on to a small stand, and, in ordinary circumstances, it always stood on one side of her dressing-table. The stand was there; the locket was gone.

He went down stairs again. The afternoon was drawing on. A servant came to ask him at what hour he wished to dine; he bade her wait till her mistress came home, and consult her. Then he went out.

It was a beautiful, quiet afternoon, with a warm light from the west shining over the now yellowing trees of the squares and gardens. He walked down towards Notting Hill Gate Station, endeavouring to convince himself that he was not perturbed, and yet looking somewhat anxiously at the cabs that passed. People were now coming out from their business in the city, by train, and omnibus, and hansom; and they seemed to be hurrying home in very good spirits, as if they were sure of the welcome awaiting them there. Now and again you would see a meeting — some demure young person, who had been furtively watching the railway-station, suddenly showing a brightness in her face, as she went forward to shake hands with some new arrival, and then tripping briskly away with him, her hand on his arm. There were men carrying home fish in small bags, or baskets of fruit—presents to their wives, doubtless, from town. Occasionally an

open carriage would go by, containing one grave and elderly gentleman and a group of small girls—probably his daughters, who had gone into the city to accompany their papa homeward. Why did these scenes and incidents, cheerful in themselves, seem to him to be somehow saddening, as he walked vaguely on? He knew, at least, that there was little use in returning home. There was no one in that silent house in the square. The rooms would be dark in the twilight. Probably dinner would be laid, with no one to sit down at the table. He wished Sheila had left word where she was going.

Then he bethought him of the way in which they had parted; and of the sense of fear that had struck him, the moment he left the house, and after all he had been too harsh with the child. Now, at least, he was ready to apologize to her. If only he could see Sheila coming along in one of those hansoms—if he could see, at any distance, the figure he knew so well walking towards him on the pavement—would he not instantly confess to her that he had been wrong, even grievously wrong, and beg her to forgive him? She should have it all her own way about going up to Lewis. He would cast aside this Society-life he had been living, and, to please her, would go in for any sort of work or amusement of which she approved. He was so anxious, indeed, to put these virtuous resolutions into force, that he suddenly turned and walked rapidly back to the house, with the wild hope that Sheila might have already come back.

The windows were dark—the curtains were yet drawn; and by this time the evening had come on, and the lamps in the square had been lit. He let himself into the house by his latch-key. He walked

into all the rooms, and up into Sheila's room; everything remained as he had left it. The white cloth glimmered in the dusk of the dining-room, and the light of the lamp outside in the street touched here and there the angles of the crystal and showed the pale colours of the glasses. The clock on the mantlepiece ticked in the silence. If Sheila had been lying dead in that small room up-stairs, the house could not have appeared more silent and solemn.

He could not bear this horrible solitude. He called one of the servants, and left a message for Sheila, if she came in in the interval, that he would be back at ten o'clock; then he went out, got into a hansom, and drove down to his club in St. James's Street.

Most of the men were dining; the other rooms were almost deserted. He did not care to dine just then. He went into the library; it was occupied by an old gentleman who was fast asleep in an easy-chair. He went into the billiard-rooms, in the vague hope that some exciting game might be going on; there was not a soul in the place, the gases were down, and an odour of stale smoke pervaded the dismal chambers. Should he go to the theatre? His sitting there would be a mockery, while this vague and terrible fear was present to his heart. Or go down to see Ingram, as had been his wont in previous hours of trouble? He dared not go near Ingram without some more definite news about Sheila. In the end, he went out into the open air, as if he were in danger of being stifled; and, walking indeterminately on, found himself once more at his own house.

The place was still quite dark; he knew before entering that Sheila had not returned, and he did not

seem to be surprised. It was now long after their ordinary dinner-hour. When he went into the house he bade the servants light the gas and bring up dinner; he would himself sit down at this solitary table, if only for the purpose of finding occupation and passing this terrible time of suspense.

It never occurred to him, as it might have occurred to him at one time, that Sheila had made some blunder somewhere and been unavoidably detained. He did not think of any possible repetition of her adventures in Richmond Park. He was too conscious of the probable reason of Sheila's remaining away from her own home; and yet, from minute to minute, he fought with that consciousness, and sought to prove to himself that, after all, she would soon be heard driving up to the door. He ate his dinner in silence; and then drew a chair up to the fire and lit a cigar.

For the first time in his life he was driven to go over the events that had occurred since his marriage, and to ask himself how it had all come about that Sheila and he were not as they once had been. He recalled the early days of their friendship at Borva; the beautiful period of their courtship; the appearance of the young wife in London; and the close relegation of Sheila to the domestic affairs of the house, while he had chosen for himself other companions, other interests, other aims. There was no attempt at self-justification in those communings, but an effort, sincere enough in its way, to understand how all this had happened. He sat and dreamed there, before the warmth of the fire, with the slow and monotonous ticking of the clock unconsciously acting on his brain. In time the silence, the warmth, the monotonous sound, produced their natural effects, and he fell fast asleep.

He awoke with a start. The small silvertoned bell on the mantelpiece had struck the hour of twelve. He looked around, and knew that the evil had come upon him: for Sheila had not returned, and all his most dreadful fears of that evening were confirmed. Sheila had gone away and left him—whither had she gone?

Now there was no more indecision in his actions. He got his hat, plunged into the cold night air, and finding a hansom, bade the man drive as hard as he could go down to Sloane Street. There was a light in Ingram's windows, which were on the ground-floor; he tapped with his stick on one of the panes—an old signal that had been in constant use when he and Ingram were close companions and friends. Ingram came to the door and opened it; the light of a lamp glared in on his face.

"Hillo, Lavender!" he said, in a tone of surprise.

The other could not speak; but he went into the house, and Ingram, shutting the door and following him, found that the man's face was deadly pale.

"Sheila——" he said, and stopped,

"Well, what about her?" said Ingram, keeping quite calm, but with wild fancies about some terrible accident almost stopping the pulsation of his heart.

"Sheila has gone away."

Ingram did not seem to understand.

"Sheila has gone away, Ingram," said Lavender, in an excited way. "You don't know anything about it? You don't know where she has gone? What am I to do, Ingram—how am I to find her? Good God, don't you understand what I tell you? And now it is past midnight, and my poor girl may be wandering about the streets."

He was walking up and down the room, paying almost no attention, in his excitement, to the small sallow-faced man, who stood quite quiet, a trifle afraid, perhaps, but with his heart full of a blaze of anger.

"She has gone away from your house," he said, slowly. "What made her do that?"

"I did," said Lavender, in a hurried way. "I have acted like a brute to her—that is true enough. You needn't say anything to me, Ingram; I feel myself far more guilty than anything you could say—you may heap reproaches on me afterwards—but tell me, Ingram, what am I to do. You know what a proud spirit she has—who can tell what she might do? She wouldn't go home—she would be too proud—she may have gone and drowned herself——"

"If you don't control yourself, and tell me what has happened, how am I to help you?" said Ingram, stiffly; and yet disposed somehow—perhaps for the sake of Sheila, perhaps because he saw that the young man's self-embarrassment and distress were genuine enough—not to be too rough with him.

"Well, you know Mairi," said Lavender, still walking up and down the room in an excited way: "Sheila had got up the girl here without telling me—some friends of mine were coming home to luncheon—we had some disagreement about Mairi being present—and then Sheila said something about not remaining in the house if Mairi did not—something of that sort. I don't know what it was, but I know it was all my fault; and if she has been driven from the house I did it—that is true enough. And where do you think she has gone, Ingram? If I could only see her for three minutes, I would explain everything; I would tell her how sorry I am for everything that has happened, and

she would see, when she went back, how everything would be right again. I had no idea she would go away. It was mere peevishness that made me object to Mairi meeting those people; and I had no idea that Sheila would take it so much to heart. Now tell me what you think should be done, Ingram—all I want is to see her just for three minutes to tell her it was all a mistake, and that she will never have to fear anything like that again."

Ingram heard him out, and said, with some precision—

"Do you mean to say that you fancy all this trouble is to be got over that way? Do you know so little of Sheila, after the time you have been married to her, as to imagine that she has taken this step out of some momentary caprice, and that a few words of apology and promise will cause her to rescind it? You must be crazed, Lavender; or else you are actually as ignorant of the nature of that girl as you were up in the Highlands."

The young man seemed to calm down his excitement and impatience, but it was because of a new fear that had struck him, and that was visible in his face.

"Do you think she will never come back, Ingram?" he said, looking aghast.

"I don't know. She may not. At all events, you may be quite sure that, once having resolved to leave your house, she is not to be pacified and cajoled by a few phrases and a promise of repentance on your part. That is quite sure. And what is quite as sure is this, that if you knew just now where she was, the most foolish thing you could do would be to go and see her——"

"But I must go and see her—I must find her out,

Ingram," he said, passionately. "I don't care what becomes of me. If she won't go back home, so much the worse for me; but I *must* find her out, and know that she is safe! Think of it, Ingram—perhaps she is walking about the streets somewhere at this moment —and you know her proud spirit—if she were to go near the river——"

"She won't go near the river," said Ingram, quietly. "And she won't be walking about the streets. She is either in the Scotch mail-train, going up to Glasgow, or else she has got some lodgings somewhere, along with Mairi. Has she any money?"

"No," said Lavender. And then he thought for a minute. "There was some money her father gave her in case she might want it at a pinch—she may have that, I hope she has that. I was to have given her money to-morrow morning. But hadn't I better go to the police-stations, and see, just by way of precaution, that she has not been heard of? I may as well do that as nothing. I could not go home to that empty house. I could not sleep."

"Sheila is a sensible girl; she is safe enough," said Ingram. "And if you don't care about going home, you may as well remain here. I can give you a room up-stairs when you want it. In the meantime, if you will pull a chair to the table, and calm yourself, and take it for granted that you will soon be assured of Sheila's safety, I will tell you what I think you should do. Here is a cigar to keep you occupied; there is whisky and cold water back there, if you like; you will do no good by punishing yourself in small matters; for your trouble is likely to be serious enough, I can tell you, before you get Sheila back, if ever you get her back. Take the chair with the cushion."

It was so like the old days when these two used to be companions! Many and many a time had the younger man come down to these lodgings, with all his troubles, and wild impulses, and pangs of contrition ready to be revealed; and then Ingram, concealing the liking he had for the lad's generous waywardness, his brilliant and facile cleverness, and his dashes of honest self-depreciation, would gravely lecture him, and put him right, and send him off comforted. Frank Lavender had changed much since then. The handsome boy had grown into a man of the world; there was less self-revelation in his manner, and he was less sensitive to the opinions and criticisms of his old friend; but Ingram, who was not prone to idealism of any sort, had never ceased to believe that this change was but superficial, and that, in different circumstances and with different aims, Lavender might still fulfil the best promise of his youth.

"You have been a good friend to me, Ingram," he said, with a hot blush, "and I have treated you as badly as I have treated——By Jove, what a chance I had at one time!"

He was looking back on all the fair pictures his imagination had drawn while yet Sheila and he were wandering about that island in the northern seas.

"You had," said Ingram, decisively. "At one time I thought you the most fortunate man in the world. There was nothing left for you to desire, as far as I could see. You were young, and strong, with plenty of good spirits and sufficient ability to earn yourself an honourable living, and you had won the love of the most beautiful and best-hearted woman I have known. You never seemed to me to know what that meant. Men marry women—there is no difficulty about

that; and you can generally get an amiable sort of person to become your wife, and have a sort of affection for you, and so on. But how many have bestowed on them the pure and exalted passion of a young and innocent girl, who is ready to worship with all the fervour of a warmly imaginative and emotional nature the man she has chosen to love? And suppose he is young, too, and capable of understanding all the tender sentiments of a high-spirited, sensitive, and loyal woman, and suppose that he fancies himself as much in love with her as she with him? These conditions are not often fulfilled, I can tell you. It is a happy fluke when they are. Many a day ago I told you that you should consider yourself more fortunate than if you had been made an Emperor; and, indeed, it seemed to me that you had everything in the shape of worldly happiness easily within your reach. How you came to kick away the ball from your feet—well—God only knows. The thing is inconceivable to me. You are sitting here as you used to sit two or three years ago; and in the interval you have had every chance in life; and now if you are not the most wretched man in London, you ought at least to be the most ashamed and repentant."

Lavender's head was buried in his hands; he did not speak.

"And it is not only your own happiness you have destroyed. When you saw that girl first, she was as light-hearted and contented with her lot as any human being could be. From one week's end to the other not the slightest care disturbed her mind. And then, when she entrusted her whole life to you—when she staked her faith in human nature on you, and gave you all the treasures of hope and reverence, and love

that lay in her pure and innocent soul—my God! what have you done with these? It is not that you have shamed and insulted her as a wife, and driven her out of her home—there are other homes than yours where she would be welcome a thousand times over—but you have destroyed her belief in everything she had taught herself to trust, you have outraged the tenderest sentiments of her heart, you have killed her faith as well as ruined her life. I talk plainly. I cannot do otherwise. If I help you now, don't imagine I condone what you have done—I would cut off my right hand first. For Sheila's sake, I will try to help you."

He stopped just then, however, and ckecked the indignation that had got the better of his ordinarily restrained manner and curt speech. The man before him was crying bitterly, his face hidden in his hands.

"Look here, Lavender," he said, presently. "I don't want to be hard on you. I tell you plainly what I think of your conduct, so that no delusions may exist between us. And I will say this for you, that the only excuse you have———"

"There is no excuse," said the other, sadly enough. "I have no excuse, and I know it."

"The only thing, then, you can say in mitigation of what you have done is that you never seem to have understood the girl whom you married. You started with giving her a fancy character when first you went to the Lewis; and once you had got the bit in your teeth, there was no stopping you. If you seek now to get Sheila back to you, the best thing you can do, I presume, would be to try to see her as she is, to win her regard that way, to abandon that operatic business, and learn to know her as a thoroughly good woman, who has her own ways and notions about

things, and who has a very definite character underlying that extreme gentleness which she fancies to be one of her duties. The child did her dead best to accommodate herself to your idea of her, and failed. When she would rather have been living a brisk and active life in the country, or by the sea-side—running wild about a hill-side, or reading strange stories in the evening, or nursing some fisherman's child that had got ill—you had her dragged into a sort of society with which she had no sympathy whatever. And the odd thing to me is that you yourself seemed to be making an effort that way! You did not always devote yourself to fashionable life. What became of all your old ambitions you used to talk about in the very chair you are now sitting in?"

"Is there any hope of my getting Sheila back?" he said, looking up at last. There was a vague and bewildered look in his eyes. He seemed incapable of thinking of anything but that.

"I don't know," said Ingram. "But one thing is certain—you will never get her back to repeat the experiment that has just ended in this desperate way."

"I should not ask that," he said, hurriedly. "I should not ask that at all. If I could but see her for a moment, I would ask her to tell me everything she wanted—everything she demanded as conditions—and I would obey them all. I will promise to do everything that she wishes."

"If you saw her, you could give her nothing but promises," said Ingram, quietly. "Now, what if you were to try to do what you know she wishes, and then go to her?"

"You mean——," said Lavender, glancing up with another startled look on his face. "You don't mean

that I am to remain away from her a long time—go into banishment, as it were—and then, some day, come back to Sheila, and beg her to forget all that happened long before."

"I mean something very like that," said Ingram, with composure. "I don't know that it would be successful. I have no means of ascertaining what Sheila would think of such a project—whether she would think that she could ever live with you again."

Lavender seemed fairly stunned by the possibility of Sheila's resolving never to see him again; and began to recall what Ingram had many a time said about the strength of purpose she could show when occasion needed.

"If her faith in you is wholly destroyed, your case is hopeless. A woman may cling to her belief in a man, through good report and evil report; but if she once loses it, she never recovers it. But there is this hope for you. I know very well that Sheila had a much more accurate notion of you than ever you had of her; and I happen to know, also, that at the very time when you were most deeply distressing her, here in London, she held the firm conviction that your conduct towards her—your habits, your very self—would alter if you could only be persuaded to get out of the life you have been leading. That was true, at least, up to the time of your leaving Brighton. She believed in you then. She believed that if you were to cut Society altogether, and go and live a useful and hard-working life somewhere, you would soon become once more the man she fell in love with up in Lewis. Perhaps she was mistaken—I don't say anything about it myself."

The terribly cool way in which Ingram talked—

separating, defining, exhibiting, so that he and his companion should get as near as possible to what he believed to be the truth of the situation—was oddly in contrast with the blind and passionate yearning of the other for some glimpse of hope. His whole nature seemed to go out in a cry to Sheila, that she would come back and give him a chance of atoning for the past. At length he rose. He looked strangely haggard, and his eyes scarcely seemed to see the things around him.

"I must go home," he said.

Ingram saw that he merely wanted to get outside and walk about in order to find some relief from this anxiety and unrest, and said—

"You ought, I think, to stop here and go to bed. But if you would rather go home, I will walk up with you, if you like."

When the two men went out, the night-air smelt sweet and moist, for rain had fallen, and the city trees were still dripping with the wet and rustling in the wind. The weather had changed suddenly, and now, in the deep blue overhead, they knew the clouds were passing swiftly by. Was it the coming light of the morning that seemed to give depth and richness to that dark blue vault, while the pavements of the streets and the houses grew vaguely distinct and grey? Suddenly in turning the corner into Piccadilly, they saw the moon appear in a rift of those passing clouds; but it was not the moonlight that shed this pale and wan greyness down the lonely streets. It is just at this moment, when the dawn of the new day begins to tell, that a great city seems at its deadest; and in the profound silence and amid the strange transformations of the cold and growing light, a man is thrown

in upon himself, and holds communion with himself, as though he and his own thoughts were all that was left in the world. Not a word passed between the two men; and Lavender, keenly sensitive to all such impressions, and now and again shivering slightly, either from cold or nervous excitement, walked blindly along the deserted streets, seeing far other things than the tall houses, and the drooping trees, and the growing light of the sky.

It seemed to him at this moment that he was looking at Sheila's funeral. There was a great stillness in that small house at Borvabost. There was a boat —Sheila's own boat—down at the shore there; and there were two or three figures in black in it. The day was grey and rainy; the sea washed along the melancholy shores; the far hills were hidden in mist. And now he saw some people come out of the house into the rain, and the bronzed and bearded men had oars with them, and on the crossed oars there was a coffin placed. They went down the hill-side. They put the coffin in the stern of the boat; and in absolute silence—except for the wailing of the women—they pulled away down the dreary Loch Roag till they came to the Island where the burial-ground is. They carried the coffin up to that small enclosure, with its rank grass growing green, and the rain falling on the rude stones and memorials. How often had he leaned on that low stone wall, and read the strange inscriptions, in various tongues, over the graves of mariners from distant countries who had met with their death on this rocky coast. Had not Sheila herself pointed out to him, with a sad air, how many of these memorials bore the words "who was drowned;" and that, too, was the burden of the rudely-spelt legends beginning

with "Hier ruht in Gott," or "Her under hviler stovit," and sometimes ending with the pathetic "Wunderschön ist unsre Hoffnung." The fishermen brought the coffin to the newly-made grave; the women standing back a bit, old Scarlett MacDonald stroking Mairi's hair, and bidding the girl control her frantic grief, though the old woman herself could hardly speak for her tears and her lamentations. He could read the words "Sheila Mackenzie" on the small silver plate: she had been taken away from all association with him and his name. And who was this old man with the white hair and the white beard, whose hands were tightly clenched, and his lips firm, and a look as of death in the sunken and wild eyes? Mackenzie was grey a year before——

"Ingram," he said, suddenly, and his voice startled his companion, "do you think it is possible to make Sheila happy again?"

"How can I tell?" said Ingram.

"You used to know everything she could wish—everything she was thinking about. If you find her out now, will you get to know? Will you see what I can do—not by asking her to come back, not by trying to get back my own happiness—but anything, it does not matter what it is, I can do for her? If she would rather not see me again, I will stay away. Will you ask her, Ingram?"

"We have got to find her first," said his companion.

"A young girl like that," said Lavender, taking no heed of the objection, "surely she cannot always be unhappy. She is so young and beautiful, and takes so much interest in many things—surely she may have a happy life."

"She might have had."

"I don't mean with me," said Lavender, with his haggard face looking still more haggard in the increasing light. "I mean anything that can be done—any way of life that will make her comfortable and contented again—anything that I can do for that, will you try to find it out, Ingram?"

"Oh yes, I will," said the other, who had been thinking with much foreboding of all these possibilities ever since they left Sloane Street, his only gleam of hope being a consciousness that this time at least there could be no doubt of Frank Lavender's absolute sincerity, of his remorse, and his almost morbid craving to make reparation if that were still possible.

They reached the house at last. There was a dim orange-coloured light shining in the passage. Lavender went on, and threw open the small room which Sheila had adorned, asking Ingram to follow him. How wild and strange this chamber looked, with the wan glare of the dawn shining in on its barbaric decorations from the sea-coast—on the shells, and skins, and feathers that Sheila had placed around! That white light of the morning was now shining everywhere into the silent and desolate house. Lavender found Ingram a bed-room; and then he turned away, not knowing what to do. He looked into Sheila's room: there were dresses, bits of finery, and what not, that he knew so well; but there was no light breathing audible in the silent and empty chamber. He shut the door as reverently as though he were shutting it on the dead; and went down-stairs and threw himself almost fainting with despair and fatigue on a sofa, while the world outside awoke to a new day, with all its countless and joyous activities and duties.

CHAPTER VI.

A Surprise.

THERE was no letter from Sheila in the morning; and Lavender, so soon as the post had come and gone, went up to Ingram's room and woke him.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Ingram," he said, "but I am going to Lewis. I shall catch the train to Glasgow at ten."

"And what do you want to get to Lewis for?" said Ingram, starting up. "Do you think Sheila would go straight back to her own people with all this humiliation upon her? And supposing she is not there, how do you propose to meet old Mackenzie?"

"I am not afraid of meeting any man," said Lavender; "I want to know where Sheila is. And if I see Mackenzie, I can only tell him frankly everything that has happened. He is not likely to say anything of me half as bad as what I think of myself."

"Now listen," said Ingram, sitting up in bed, with his brown beard and greyish hair in a considerably dishevelled condition. "Sheila may have gone home, but it isn't likely. If she has not, your taking the story up there, and spreading it abroad, would prepare a great deal of pain for her when she might go back at some future time. But suppose you want to make sure that she has not gone to her father's house. She could not have got down to Glasgow sooner than this morning, by last night's train, you know. It is to-morrow morning, not this morning, that the Stornoway steamer starts; and she would be certain to go direct to it at the Glasgow Broomielaw, and go round the Mull of Cantyre instead of catching it up at Oban, because she knows the people in the boat, and she

and Mairi would be among friends. If you really want to know whether she has gone north, perhaps you could do no better than run down to Glasgow to-day, and have a look at the boat that starts to-morrow morning. I would go with you myself, but I can't escape the office to-day."

Lavender agreed to do this; and was about to go. But before he bade his friend good-bye, he lingered for a second or two in a hesitating way, and then he said—

"Ingram, you were speaking the other night of your going up to Borva. If you should go——"

"Of course I shan't go," said the other, promptly. "How could I face Mackenzie when he began to ask me about Sheila? No, I cannot go to Borva while this affair remains in its present condition; and, indeed, Lavender, I mean to stop in London till I see you out of your trouble somehow."

"You are heaping coals of fire on my head."

"Oh, don't look at it that way. If I can be of any help to you, I shall expect, this time, to have a return for it."

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you when we get to know something of Sheila's intentions."

And so Frank Lavender found himself once more, as in the old times, in the Euston Station, with the Scotch mail ready to start, and all manner of folks bustling about with that unnecessary activity which betokens the excitement of a holiday. What a strange holiday was his! He got into a smoking-carriage in order to be alone; and he looked out on the people who were bidding their friends good-bye. Some of them were not very pretty; many of them were ordi-

nary, insignificant, commonplace-looking folks; but it was clear that they had those about them who loved them and thought much of them. There was one man whom, in other circumstances, Lavender would have dismissed with contempt as an excellent specimen of the unmitigated cad. He wore a white waistcoat, purple gloves, and a green sailor's knot with a diamond in it; and there was a cheery, vacuous, smiling expression on his round face as he industriously smoked a cheroot and made small jokes to the friends who had come to see him off. One of them was a young woman, not very good-looking, perhaps, who did not join in the general hilarity: and it occurred to Lavender that the jovial man with the cheroot was perhaps cracking his little jokes to keep up her spirits. At all events he called her "my good lass" from time to time, and patted her on the shoulder, and was very kind to her. And when the guard came up, and bade everybody get in, the man kissed the girl, and shook hands with her, and bade her good-bye; and then she, moved by some sudden impulse, caught his face in both her hands and kissed him once on each cheek. It was a ridiculous scene. People who wear green ties with diamond pins care nothing for decorum. And yet Lavender, when he averted his eyes from this parting, could not help recalling what Ingram had been saying the night before, and wondered whether this outrageous person, with his abominable decorations and his genial grin, might not be more fortunate than many a great statesman, or warrior, or monarch.

He turned round to find the cad beside him; and presently the man, with an abounding good nature, began to converse with him, and explained that it was 'igh 'oliday with him, for that he had got a pass to

travel first-class as far as Carlisle. He hoped they would have a jolly time of it together. He explained the object of his journey in the frankest possible fashion; made a kindly little joke upon the hardship of parting with one's sweetheart; said that a faint heart never won fair lady, and that it was no good crying over spilt milk. She would be all right, and precious glad to see him back in three weeks' time, and he meant to bring her a present that would be good for sore eyes.

"Perhaps you're a married man, sir, and got past all them games?" said the cad, cheerily.

"Yes, I am married," said Lavender, coldly.

"And you're going further than Carlisle, you say, sir? I'll be sworn the good lady is up somewhere in that direction, and she won't be disappointed when she sees you—oh no! Scotch, sir?"

"I am not Scotch," said Lavender, curtly.

"And she?"

Should he have to throw the man out of the window?

"Yes."

"The Scotch are a strange race—very," said the genial person, producing a brandy flask. "They drink a trifle, don't they; and yet they keep their wits about them if you've dealings with them. A very strange race of people in my opinion—very. Know the story of the master who fancied his man was drunk? 'Donald, you're trunk,' says he. 'It's a tam lee,' says Donald. 'Donald, ye ken ye're trunk!' says the master. 'Ah ken ah wish to Kott ah wass!' says Donald. Good story, ain't it, sir?"

Lavender had heard the remarkable old joke a hundred times; but just at this moment there was

something odd in this vulgar person suddenly imitating, and imitating very well, the Highland accent. Had he been away up in the north: or had he merely heard the story related by one who had been? Lavender dared not ask, however, for fear of prolonging a conversation in which he had no wish to join. Indeed, to get rid of the man, he shoved a whole bundle of the morning papers into his hands.

"What's your opinion of politics at present, sir?" observed his friend, in an off-hand way.

"I haven't any," said Lavender, compelled to take back one of the newspapers, and open it.

"I think, myself, they're in a bad state. That's my opinion. There ain't a man among 'em who knows how to keep down those people. That's my opinion, sir. What do you think?"

"Oh, I think so, too," said Lavender. "You'll find a good article in that paper on University Tests."

The cheery person looked rather blank.

"I would like to hear your opinion about 'em, sir," he said. "It ain't much good reading only one side of the question; but when you can talk about it and discuss it, now——"

"I am sorry I can't oblige you," said Lavender, goaded into making some desperate effort to release himself. "I am suffering from relaxed throat at present. My doctor has warned me against talking too much."

"I beg your pardon, sir. You don't seem very well—perhaps the throat comes with a little feverishness, you see—a cold, in fact. Now, if I was you, I'd try tannin lozenges for the throat. They're uncommon good for the throat; and a little quinine for the general system—that would put you as right as a

fiver. I tried it myself when I was down in 'Ampshire last year. And you wouldn't find a drop of this brandy a bad thing either, if you don't mind rowing in the same boat as myself."

Lavender declined the proffered flask, and subsided behind a newspaper. His fellow-traveller lit another cheroot, took up Bradshaw, and settled himself in a corner.

Had Sheila come up this very line some dozen hours before? Lavender asked himself, as he looked out on the hills, and valleys, and woods of Buckinghamshire. Had the throbbing of the engine and the rattle of the wheels kept the piteous eyes awake all through the dark night, until the pale dawn showed the girl a wild vision of northern hills and moors, telling her she was getting near to her own country? Not thus had Sheila proposed to herself to return home on the first holiday-time that should occur to them both. He began to think of his present journey as it might have been in other circumstances. Would she have remembered any of those pretty villages which she saw one early morning, long ago, when they were bathed in sunshine, and scarcely awake to the new day? Would she be impatient at the delays at the stations, and anxious to hurry on to Westmoreland and Dumfries, to Glasgow, and Oban, and Skye, and then from Stornoway across the island to the little inn at Garra-na-hina? Here, as he looked out of the window, the first indication of the wilder country became visible in the distant Berkshire hills. Close at hand the country lay green and bright under a brilliant sun; but over there in the east, some heavy clouds darkened the landscape, and the far hills seemed to be placed amid a gloomy stretch of moorland. Would

not Sheila have been thrilled by this glimpse of the coming north? She would have fancied that greater mountains lay far behind these rounded slopes, hidden in mist. She would have imagined that no human habitations were near those rising plains of sombre hue, where the red-deer and the fox ought to dwell. And in her delight at getting away from the fancied brightness of the south, would she not have been exceptionally grateful and affectionate towards himself, and striven to please him with her tender ways?

It was not a cheerful journey—this lonely trip to the North. Lavender got to Glasgow that night; and next morning he went down, long before any passengers could have thought of arriving, to the *Clansman*. He did not go near the big steamer, for he was known to the captain and the steward; but he hung about the quays, watching each person who went on board. Sheila certainly was not among the passengers by the *Clansman*.

But she might have gone to Greenock, and waited for the steamer there. Accordingly, after the *Clansman* had started on her voyage, he went into a neighbouring hotel and had some breakfast, after which he crossed the bridge to the station, and took rail for Greenock, where he arrived some time before the *Clansman* made her appearance. He went down to the quay. It was yet early morning, and a cool fresh breeze was blowing in across the broad waters of the Firth, where the sunlight was shining on the white sails of the yachts and on the dipping and screaming sea-gulls. Far away beyond the pale blue mountains opposite lay the wonderful net-work of sea-loch and island through which one had to pass to get to the distant Lewis. How gladly, at this moment, would he

have stepped on board the steamer, with Sheila, and put out on that gleaming plain of sea, knowing that by and by they would sail into Stornoway harbour and find the waggonette there. They would not hasten the voyage. She had never been round the Mull of Cantyre; and so he would sit by her side, and show her the wild tides meeting there, and the long jets of white foam shooting up the great wall of rocks. He would show her the pale coast of Ireland; and then they would see Islay, of which she had many a ballad and story. They would go through the narrow Sound that is overlooked by the gloomy mountains of Jura. They would see the distant islands where the chief of Colonsay is still mourned for on the still evenings, by the hapless mermaiden who sings her wild song across the sea. They would keep wide of the dangerous currents of Corryvreckan; and by and by they would sail into the harbour of Oban, the beautiful sea-town where Sheila first got a notion of the greatness of the world lying outside of her native island.

What if she were to come down now from this busy little seaport, which lay under a pale blue smoke, and come out upon this pier to meet the free sunlight and the fresh sea-air blowing all about? Surely at a great distance he could recognize the proud, light step, and the proud, sad face. Would she speak to him; or go past him, with firm lips and piteous eyes, to wait for the great steamer that was now coming along out of the eastern mist? Lavender glanced vaguely round the quays and the thoroughfares leading to them; but there was no one like Sheila there. In the distance he could hear the throbbing of the *Clansman's* engines, as the big steamer came on through the white plain. The sun was warmer now

on the bright waters of the Firth; and the distant haze over the pale blue mountains beyond had grown more luminous. Small boats went by; with here and there a yachtsman, scarlet-capped, and in white costume, taking a leisurely breakfast on deck. The seagulls circled about, or dipped down on the waters, or chased each other with screams and cries. Then the *Clansman* sailed into the quay, and there was a flinging of ropes, and general hurry and bustle, while people came crowding round the gangways, calling out to each other in every variety of dialect and accent.

Sheila was not there. He lingered about, and patiently waited for the starting of the steamer, not knowing how long she ordinarily remained at Greenock. He was in no hurry, indeed; for after the vessel had gone, he found himself with a whole day before him, and with no fixed notion as to how it could be passed.

In other circumstances, he would have been in no difficulty as to the spending of a bright forenoon and afternoon by the side of the sea. Or he could have run through to Edinburgh, and called on some artist-friends there. Or he could have crossed the Firth, and had a day's ramble among the mountains. But now that he was satisfied Sheila had not gone home, all his fancies and hopes went back to London. She was in London. And while he was glad she had not gone straight to her own people with a revelation of her wrongs, he scarcely dared speculate on what adventures and experiences might have befallen those two girls turned out into a great city, of which they were about equally ignorant.

The day passed somehow, and at night he was on his way to London. Next morning he went down to Whitehall, and saw Ingram.

"Sheila has not gone back to the Highlands, so far as I can make out," he said.

"So much the better," was the answer.

"What am I to do? She must be in London; and who knows what may befall her?"

"I cannot tell you what you should do. Of course you would like to know where she is; and I fancy she would have no objection herself to letting you know that she was all right, so long as she knew that you would not go near her. I don't think she has taken so decided a step merely for the purpose of being coaxed back again—that is not Sheila's way."

"I won't go near her," he said. "I only want to know that she is safe and well. I will do whatever she likes; but I must know where she is, and that she has come to no harm."

"Well," said Ingram, slowly, "I was talking the matter over with Mrs. Lorraine last night——"

"Does *she* know?" said Lavender, wincing somewhat.

"Certainly," Ingram answered. "I did not tell her. I had promised to go up there about something quite different, when she immediately began to tell me the news. Of course it was impossible to conceal such a thing. Don't all the servants about know?"

"I don't care who knows," said Lavender, moodily. "What does Mrs. Lorraine say about this affair?"

"Mrs. Lorraine says that it serves you right," said Ingram, bluntly.

"Thank her very much. I like candour, especially in a fair-weather friend."

"Mrs. Lorraine is a better friend to you than you imagine," Ingram said, taking no notice of the sneer. "When she thought that your going to their house

continually was annoying Sheila, she tried to put a stop to it for Sheila's sake. And now, at this very moment, she is doing her very best to find out where Sheila is; and if she succeeds, she means to go and plead your cause with the girl."

"I will not have her do anything of the kind," said Lavender, fiercely. "I will plead my own cause with Sheila. I will have forgiveness from Sheila herself alone—not brought to me by any intermeddling woman."

"You needn't call names," said Ingram, coolly. "But I confess I think you are right; and I told Mrs. Lorraine that was what you would doubtless say. In any case, she can do no harm in trying to find out where Sheila is."

"And how does she propose to succeed? Pollaky? The 'Agony' Column? Placards, or a Bellman? I tell you, Ingram, I won't have that woman meddle in my affairs—coming forward as a sister of mercy to heal the wounded—bestowing mock compassion, and laughing all the time——"

"Lavender, you are beside yourself. That woman is one of the most good-natured, shrewd, clever, and amiable women I have ever met. What has enraged you?"

"Bah! She has got hold of you too, has she? I tell you she is a rank impostor."

"An impostor!" said Ingram slowly. "I have heard a good many people called impostors. Did it ever occur to you that the blame of the imposture might possibly lie with the person imposed on? I have heard of people falling into the delusion that a certain modest and simple-minded man was a great politician or a great wit, although he had never claimed

to be anything of the kind; and then, when they found out that in truth he was just what he had pretended to be, they called out against him as an impostor. I have heard, too, of young gentlemen accusing women of imposture whose only crime was, that they did not possess qualities which they had never pretended to possess, but which the young gentlemen fancied they ought to possess. Mrs. Lorraine may be an impostor to you. I think she is a thoroughly good woman, and I know she is a very delightful companion. And if you want to know how she means to find Sheila out, I can tell you. She thinks that Sheila would probably go to an hotel, but that afterwards she would try to find lodgings with some of the people whom she had got to know through her giving them assistance. Mrs. Lorraine would like to ask your servants about the women who used to come for this help. Then, she thinks, Sheila would probably get some one of these humble friends to call for her letters, for she would like to hear from her father, and she would not care to tell him that she had left your house. There is a great deal of supposition in all this; but Mrs. Lorraine is a shrewd woman, and I would trust her instinct in such matters a long way. She is quite sure that Sheila would be too proud to tell her father, and very much averse, also, to inflicting so severe a blow on him——"

"But surely," Lavender said, hastily, "if Sheila wishes to conceal this affair for a time, she must believe it to be only temporary? She cannot propose to make the separation final?"

"That I don't know anything about. I would advise you to go and see Mrs. Lorraine."

"I won't go and see Mrs. Lorraine."

"Now, this is unreasonable, Lavender. You begin to fancy that Sheila had some sort of dislike to Mrs. Lorraine, founded on ignorance; and straightway you think it is your duty to go and hate the woman. Whatever you may think of her, she is willing to do you a service."

"Will you go, Ingram, and take her to those servants?"

"Certainly, I will, if you commission me to do so," said Ingram, readily.

"I suppose they all know?"

"They do."

"And everyone else?"

"I should think few of your friends would remain in ignorance of it."

"Ah, well," said Lavender, "if only I could get Sheila to overlook what is past, this once, I should not trouble my dear friends and acquaintances for their sympathy and condolence. By the time I saw them again, I fancy they would have forgotten our names."

There was no doubt of the fact that the news of Sheila's flight from her husband's house had travelled very speedily round the circle of Lavender's friends, and doubtless, in due time, it reached the ears of his aunt. At all events, Mrs. Lavender sent a message to Ingram, asking him to come and see her. When he went, he found the little, dry, hard-eyed woman in a terrible passion. She had forgotten all about Marcus Aurelius, and the composure of a philosopher, and the effect of anger on the nervous system. She was bolstered up in bed, for she had had another bad fit; but she was brisk enough in her manner and fierce enough in her language.

"Mr. Ingram," she said, the moment he had entered, "do you consider my nephew a beast?"

"I don't," he said.

"I do," she retorted.

"Then you are quite mistaken, Mrs. Lavender. Probably you have heard some exaggerated story of all this business. He has been very inconsiderate and thoughtless, certainly; but I don't believe he quite knew how sensitive his wife was; and he is very repentant now, and I know he will keep his promises."

"You would apologize for the devil," said the little old woman, frowning.

"I would try to give him his due, at all events," said Ingram, with a laugh. "I know Frank Lavender very well—I have known him for years; and I know there is good stuff in him, which may be developed in proper circumstances. After all, what is there more common than for a married man to neglect his wife? He only did unconsciously and thoughtlessly what heaps of men do deliberately."

"You are making me angry," said Mrs. Lavender, in a severe voice.

"I don't think it fair to expect men to be demigods," Ingram said, carelessly. "I never met any demigods myself; they don't live in my neighbourhood. Perhaps if I had had some experience of a batch of them, I should be more censorious of other people. If you set up Frank for a Bayard, is it his fault, or yours?"

"I am not going to be talked out of my common sense, and me on my death-bed," said the old lady, impatiently, and yet with some secret hope that Ingram would go on talking and amuse her. "I won't have you say he is anything but a stupid and un-

grateful boy, who married a wife far too good for him. He is worse than that—he is much worse than that; but as this may be my death-bed, I will keep a civil tongue in my head."

"I thought you did not like his wife very much?" said Ingram.

"I am not bound to like her because I think badly of him, am I? She was not a bad sort of girl, after all—temper a little stiff, perhaps; but she was honest. It did one's eyes good to look at her bright face. Yes, she was a good sort of creature in her way. But when she ran off from him, why didn't she come to me?"

"Perhaps you never encouraged her."

"Encouragement! Where ought a married woman go to but to her husband's relatives? If she cannot stay with him, let her take the next best substitute. It was her duty to come to me."

"If Sheila had fancied it to be her duty, she would have come here, at any cost."

"What do you mean, Mr. Ingram?" said Mrs. Lavender, severely.

"Well, supposing she didn't like you——" he was beginning to say, cautiously, when she sharply interrupted him.

"She didn't like me, eh?"

"I said nothing of the kind. I was about to say that if she had thought it her duty to come here, she would have come, in any circumstances."

"She might have done worse. A young woman risks a great deal in running away from her husband's home. People will talk. Who is to make people believe just the version of the story that the husband or wife would prefer?"

"And what does Sheila care," said Ingram, with a

hot flush in his face, "for the belief of a lot of idle gossips and slanderers?"

"My dear Mr. Ingram," said the old lady, "you are not a woman, and you don't know the bother one has to look after one's reputation. But that is a question not likely to interest you. Let us talk of something else. Do you know why I wanted you to come and see me to-day?"

"I am sure I don't."

"I mean to leave you all my money."

He stared. She did not appear to be joking. Was it possible that her rage against her nephew had carried her to this extreme resolve?

"Oh!" he stammered; "but I won't have it, Mrs. Lavender."

"But you'll have to have it," said the little old woman, severely. "You are a poor man. You could make good use of my money—better than a charity board—that would starve the poor with a penny out of each shilling, and spend the other eleven pence in treating their friends to flower-shows and dinners. Do you think I mean to leave my money to such people? You shall have it. I think you would look very well driving a mail-phaeton in the Park; and I suppose you would give up your pipes and your philosophy, and your bachelor walks into the country. You would marry, of course—every man is bound to make a fool of himself that way, as soon as he gets enough money to do it with. But perhaps you might come across a clever and sensible woman, who would look after you, and give you your own way while having her own. Only don't marry a fool. Whatever you do, don't marry a fool, or all your philosophers won't make the house bearable to you."

"I am not likely to marry anybody, Mrs. Lavender," said Ingram, carelessly.

"Is there no woman you know whom you would care to marry?"

"Oh," he said, "there is one woman—yes—who seems to me about everything that a man could wish; but the notion of my marrying her is absurd. If I had known in time, don't you see, that I should ever think of such a thing, I should have begun years ago to dye my hair. I can't begin now. Grey hair inspires reverence, I believe; but it is a bad thing to go courting with."

"You must not talk foolishly," said the little old lady, with a frown. "Do you think a sensible woman wants to marry a boy, who will torment her with his folly, and his empty head, and his running after a dozen different women? Grey hair! If you think grey hair is a bad thing to go courting with, I will give you something better. I will put something in your hand that will make the young lady forget your grey hair. Oh, of course, you will say that she cannot be tempted; that she despises money. If so, so much the better; but I have known more women than you, and my hair is greyer than yours; and you will find that a little money won't stand in the way of your being accepted."

He had made some gesture of protest, not against her speaking of his possible marriage, which scarcely interested him, so remote was the possibility, but against her returning to this other proposal. And when he saw the old woman really meant to do this thing, he found it necessary to declare himself explicitly on the point.

"Oh, don't imagine, Mrs. Lavender," he said, "that

I have any wild horror of money, or that I suppose anybody else would have. I should like to have five times, or ten times as much as you seem generously disposed to give me. But here is the point, you see. I am a vain person. I am very proud of my own opinion of myself; and, if I acceded to what you propose—if I took your money—I suppose I should be driving about in that fine phaeton you speak of. That is very good—I like driving, and I should be pleased with the appearance of the trap and the horses. But what do you fancy I should think of myself—what would be my opinion of my own nobleness, and generosity, and humanity—if I saw Sheila Mackenzie walking by on the pavement, without any carriage to drive in, perhaps without a notion as to where she was going to get her dinner? I should be a great hero to myself then, shouldn't I?"

"Oh, Sheila again!" said the old woman, in a tone of vexation. "I can't imagine what there is in that girl to make men rave so about her. That Jew-boy is become a thorough nuisance—you would fancy she had just stepped down out of the clouds to present him with a gold harp, and that he couldn't look up to her face. And you are just as bad. You are worse—for you don't blow it off in steam. Well, there need be no difficulty. I meant to leave the girl in your charge. You take the money and look after her—I know she won't starve. Take it in trust for her, if you like."

"But that is a fearful responsibility, Mrs. Lavender," he said, in dismay. "She is a married woman. Her husband is the proper person——"

"I tell you I won't give him a farthing!" she said, with a sudden sharpness that startled him. "Not a

farthing! If he wants money, let him work for it, as other people do; and then, when he has done that, if he is to have any of my money, he must be beholden for it to his wife and to you."

"Do you think that Sheila would accept anything that she would not immediately hand over to him?"

"Then he must come first to you."

"I have no wish to inflict humiliation on anyone," said Ingram, stiffly. "I don't wish to play the part of a little Providence, and mete out punishment in that way. I might have to begin with myself."

"Now, don't be foolish," said the old lady, with a menacing composure. "I give you fair warning. The next fit will do for me. If you don't care to take my money, and keep it in trust for this girl you profess to care so much about, I will leave it to found an institution. And I have a good idea for an institution, mind you. I mean to teach people what they should eat and drink, and the various effects of food on various constitutions."

"It is an important subject," Ingram admitted.

"Is it not? What is the use of giving people laborious information about the idle fancies of generations that lived ages before they were born, while you are letting them poison their system, and lay up for themselves a fearfully painful old age, by the continuous use of unsuitable food? That book you gave me, Mr. Ingram, is a wonderful book; but it gives you little consolation if you know another fit is coming on. And what is the good of knowing about Epictetus, and Zeno, and the rest, if you've got rheumatism? Now I mean to have classes, to teach people what they should eat and drink—and I'll do it, if you won't assume the guardianship of my nephew's wife."

"But this is the wildest notion I ever heard of!" Ingram protested again. "How can I take charge of her? If Sheila herself had shown any disposition to place herself under your care, it might have been different."

"Oh, it would have been different!" cried the old lady, with a shrill laugh. "It would have been different! And what did you say about her sense of duty to her husband's relatives? Did you say anything about that?"

"Well——" Ingram was about to say, being lost in amazement at the odd glee of this withered old creature.

"Where do you think a young wife should go, if she runs off from her husband's house?" cried Mrs. Lavender, apparently much amused by his perplexity. "Where can she best escape calumny? Poor man! I won't frighten you, or disturb you any longer. Ring the bell, will you? I want Paterson."

Ingram rang.

"Paterson," said Mrs. Lavender, when the tall and grave woman appeared, "ask Mrs. Lavender if she can come here for a few minutes."

Ingram looked at the old woman, to see if she had gone mad; and then, somehow, he instinctively turned to the door. He fancied he knew that quick, light step. And then, before he well knew how, Sheila had come forward to him, with her hands outstretched, and with something like a smile on her pale face. She looked at him for a second; she tried to speak to him, but there was a dangerous quivering of the lips; and then she suddenly burst into tears, and let go his hands and turned away. In that brief moment he had seen what havoc had been wrought within the past two or three days. There were the same proud and

handsome features, but they were pale and wan; and there was a piteous and weary look in the eyes, that told of the trouble and heartrending of sleepless nights.

"Sheila," he said, following her and taking her hand, "does anyone know of your being here?"

"No," she said, still holding her head aside, and downcast; "no one. And I do not wish anyone to know. I am going away."

"Where?"

"Don't you ask too much, Mr. Ingram," said the old lady, from amid her cushions and curtains. "Give her that ammonia—the stopper only. Now, sit down, child; and dry your eyes. You need not be ashamed to show Mr. Ingram that you knew where you ought to come to when you left your husband's house. And if you won't stop here, of course I can't compel you; though Mr. Ingram will tell you you might do worse."

"Sheila, why do you wish to go away? Do you mean to go back to the Lewis?"

"Oh! no, no!" she said, almost shuddering.

"Where do you wish to go?"

"Anywhere—it does not matter. But I cannot remain here. I should meet with—with many people I used to know. Mrs. Lavender, she is kind enough to say she will get me some place, for Mairi and me—that is all as yet that is settled."

"Is Mairi with you?"

"Yes; I will go and bring her to you. It is not anyone in London she will want to see as much as you."

Sheila left the room, and by and by came back, leading the young Highland girl by the hand. Mairi was greatly embarrassed, scarcely knowing whether she should show any gladness at meeting this old

friend amid so much trouble. But when Ingram shook hands with her, and after she had blushed, and looked shy, and said, "And are you ferry well, sir?" she managed somehow to lift her eyes to his face; and then she said, suddenly—

"And it is a good day, this day, for Miss Sheila, that you will come to see her, Mr. Ingram; for she will hef a friend now."

"You silly girl," said Mrs. Lavender, sharply, "why will you say 'Miss Sheila'? Don't you know she is a married woman?"

Mairi glanced in a nervous and timid manner towards the bed. She was evidently afraid of the little shrivelled old woman with the staring black eyes and the harsh voice.

"Mairi hasn't forgotten her old habits, that is all," said Ingram, patting her good-naturedly on the head.

And then he sat down again; and it seemed so strange to him to see these two together again, and to hear the odd infection of Mairi's voice, that he almost forgot that he had made a great discovery in learning of Sheila's whereabouts, and wholly forgot that he had just been offered, and had just refused, a fortune.

CHAPTER VII.

Meeting and Parting.

THE appearance of Sheila in Mrs. Lavender's house certainly surprised Ingram; but the motives which led her to go thither were simple enough. On the morning on which she had left her husband's house, she and Mairi had been driven up to Euston Square Sta-

tion before she seemed capable of coming to any decision. Mairi guessed at what had happened, with a great fear at her heart, and did not dare to speak of it. She sat, mute and frightened, in a corner of the cab, and only glanced from time to time at her companion's pale face and troubled and distant eyes.

They were driven in to the station. Sheila got out, still seeming to know nothing of what was around her. The cabman took down Mairi's trunk, and handed it to a porter.

"Where for, miss?" said the man. And she started.

"Where will you be going, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi, timidly.

"It is no matter just now," said Sheila to the porter, "if you will be so kind as to take charge of the trunk. And how much must I pay the cabman from Notting Hill?"

She gave him the money, and walked into the great stone-paved hall, with its lofty roof and sounding echoes.

"Mairi," she said, "I have gone away from my own home, and I have no home for you or myself either. What are we to do?"

"Are you quite sure, Miss Sheila," said the girl, dismayed beyond expression, "that you will not go back to your own house? It wass a bad day this day that I wass come to London to find you going away from your own house?"

And Mairi began to cry.

"Will we go back to the Lewis, Miss Sheila?" she said. "It is many a one there will be proud and pleased to see you again in sa Lewis, and there will be plenty of homes for you there—oh, yes! ferry many that will be glad to see you! And it was a bad day

sa day you left the Lewis whatever; and if you will go back again, Miss Sheila, you will neffer hef to go away again not any more."

Sheila looked at the girl—at the pretty pale face, the troubled light-blue eyes, and the abundant fair-yellow hair. It was Mairi, sure enough, who was talking to her; and yet it was in a strange place. There was no sea dashing outside—no tide running in from the Atlantic. And where was old Scarlett, with her complaints, and her petulance, and her motherly kindness?

"It is a pity you have come to London, Mairi," Sheila said, wistfully; "for I have no house to take you into; and we must go now and find one."

"You will not go back to sa Lewis, Miss Sheila?"

"They would not know me in the Lewis any more, Mairi. I have been too long away, and I am quite changed. It is many a time I will think of going back; but when I left the Lewis, I was married; and now—— How could I go back to the Lewis, Mairi? They would look at me. They would ask questions. My father would come down to the quay, and he would say, 'Sheila have you come back alone?' And all the story of it would go about the island, and everyone would say I had been a bad wife, and my husband had gone away from me."

"There is not anyone," said Mairi, with the tears starting to her eyes again, "not from end of sa island to sa other, would say that of you, Miss Sheila; and there is no one would not come to meet you, and be glad sat you will come again to your own home. And as for going back, I will be ferry glad to go back whatever, for it was you I wass come to see, and not any town; and I do not like this town, what I hef seen of

it, and I will be ferry glad to go away wis you, Miss Sheila."

Sheila did not answer. She felt that it was impossible she could go back to her own people with this disgrace upon her, and did not even argue the question with herself. All her trouble now was to find some harbour of refuge into which she could flee, so that she might have quiet, and solitude, and an opportunity of studying all that had befallen her. The noise around her—the arrival of travellers, the transference of luggage, the screaming of trains—stunned her and confused her; and she could only vaguely think of all the people she knew in London, to see to whom she could go for advice and direction. They were not many. One after the other she went over the acquaintances she had made; and not one of them appeared to her in the light of a friend. One friend she had, who would have rejoiced to have been of the least assistance to her; but her husband had forbidden her to hold communication with him, and she felt a strange sort of pride, even at this moment, in resolving to obey that injunction. In all this great city that lay around her, there was no other to whom she could frankly and readily go. That one friend she had possessed before she came to London; in London, she had not made another.

And yet it was necessary to do something; for who could tell but that her husband might come to this station in search of her? Mairi's anxiety, too, was increasing every moment; insomuch that she was fairly trembling with excitement and fatigue. Sheila resolved that she would go down and throw herself on the tender mercies of that terrible old lady in Kensington Gore. For one thing, she instinctively sought the help

of a woman in her present plight; and perhaps this harshly-spoken old lady would be gentle to her when all her story was told. Another thing that prompted this decision was a sort of secret wish to identify herself even yet with her husband's family; to prove to herself, as it were, that they had not cast her off as being unworthy of him. Nothing was further from her mind at this moment than any desire to pave the way for reconciliation and reunion with her husband. Her whole anxiety was to get away from him; to put an end to a state of things which she had found to be more than she could bear. And yet, if she had had friends in London called respectively Mackenzie and Lavender, and if she had been equally intimate with both, she would at this moment have preferred to go for help to those bearing the name of Lavender.

There was doubtless something strangely inconsistent in this instinct of wifely loyalty and duty in a woman who had just voluntarily left her husband's house. Lavender had desired her not to hold communication with Edward Ingram; even now she would respect his wish. Lavender would prefer that she should, in any great extremity, go to his aunt for assistance and counsel; and to his aunt, despite her own dislike of the woman, she would go. At this moment, when Sheila's proud spirit had risen up in revolt against a system of treatment that had become insufferable to her, when she had been forced to leave her home and incur the contemptuous compassion of friends and acquaintances, if Edward Ingram himself had happened to meet her, and had begun to say hard things of Lavender, she would have sharply recalled him to a sense of the discretion that one must use in speaking to a wife of her husband.

The two homeless girls got into another cab, and were driven down to Kensington Gore. Sheila asked if she could see Mrs. Lavender. She knew that the old lady had had another bad fit; but she was supposed to be recovering rapidly. Mrs. Lavender would see her in her bedroom; and so Sheila went up.

The girl could not speak.

"Yes, I see it—something wrong about that precious husband of yours," said the old lady, watching her keenly. "I expected it. Go on. What is the matter?"

"I have left him," Sheila said, with her face very pale, but no sign of emotion about the firm lips.

"Oh, good gracious, child! Left him? How many people know it?"

"No one, but yourself, and a young Highland girl who has come up to see me."

"You came to me first of all?"

"Yes."

"Have you no other friends to go to?"

"I considered that I ought to come to you."

There was no cunning in the speech; it was the simple truth. Mrs. Lavender looked at her hard for a second or two, and then said, in what she meant to be a kind way—

"Come here, and sit down, child; and tell me all about it. If no one else knows it, there is no harm done. We can easily patch it up before it gets abroad."

"I did not come to you for that, Mrs. Lavender," said Sheila, calmly. "That is impossible. That is all over. I have come to ask you where I may get lodgings for my friend and myself."

"Tell me all about it, first: and then we'll see

whether it can't be mended. Mind, I am ready to be on your side, though I am your husband's aunt. I think you're a good girl—a bit of a temper, you know—but you manage to keep it quiet ordinarily. You tell me all about it; and you'll see if I haven't means to bring him to reason. Oh, yes—oh, yes—I'm an old woman; but I can find some means to bring him to reason." And she laughed an odd, shrill laugh.

A hot flush came over Sheila's face. Had she come to this old woman only to make her husband's degradation more complete? Was he to be intimidated into making friends with her by a threat of the withdrawal of that money that Sheila had begun to detest? And this was what her notions of wifely duty had led to!

"Mrs. Lavender," she said, with the proud lips very proud indeed, "I must say this to you before I tell you anything. It is very good of you to say you will take my side; but I did not come to you to complain. And I would rather not have any sympathy from you if it only means that you will speak ill of my husband. And if you think you can make him do things because you give him money—perhaps that is true at present; but it may not always be true, and you cannot expect me to wish it to continue. I would rather have my present trouble twenty times over than see him being bought over to any woman's wishes."

Mrs. Lavender stared at her.

"Why, you astonishing girl, I believe you are still in love with that man."

Sheila said nothing.

"Is it true?" she said.

"I suppose a woman ought to love her husband," Sheila answered.

"Even if he turns her out of the house?"

"Perhaps it is she who is to blame," Sheila said, humbly. "Perhaps her education was wrong—or she expects too much that is unreasonable—or perhaps she has a bad temper. You think I have a bad temper, Mrs. Lavender; and might it not be that?"

"Well, I think you want your own way; and doubtless you expect it now. I suppose I am to listen to all your story, and I must not say a word about my own nephew. But sit down and tell all about it; and then you can justify him afterwards, if you like."

It was probably, however, the notion that Sheila would try to justify Lavender all through that put the old lady on her guard, and made her, indeed, regard Lavender's conduct in an unfairly bad light. Sheila told the story as simply as she could, putting everything down to her husband's advantage that was possible, and asking for no sympathy whatsoever. She only wanted to remain away from his house; and by what means could she and this young cousin of hers find cheap lodgings where they could live quietly, and without much fear of detection?

Mrs. Lavender was in a rage; and, as she was not allowed to vent it on the proper object, she turned upon Sheila herself.

"The Highlanders are a proud race," she said, sharply. "I should have thought that rooms in this house, even with the society of a cantankerous old woman, would have been tolerated for a time."

"It is very kind of you to make the offer," Sheila said, "but I do not wish to have to meet my husband or any of his friends. There is enough trouble without that. If you could tell me where to get lodgings not far from this neighbourhood, I would come to see you

sometimes at such hours as I know he cannot be here."

"But I don't understand what you mean. You won't go back to your husband—although I could manage that for you directly. You won't hear of negotiations, or of any prospect of your going back; and yet you won't go home to your father."

"I cannot do either," Sheila said.

"Do you mean to live in those lodgings always?"

"How can I tell?" said the girl, piteously. "I only wish to be away; and I cannot go back to my papa, with all this story to tell him."

"Well, I didn't want to distress you," said the old woman. "You know your own affairs best. I think you are mad. If you would calmly reason with yourself, and show to yourself that, in a hundred years, or less than that, it won't matter whether you gratified your pride or no, you would see that the wisest thing you can do now is to take an easy and comfortable course. You are in an excited and nervous state at present, for example; and that is destroying so much of the vital portion of your frame. If you go into these lodgings, and live like a rat in a hole, you will have nothing to do but nurse these sorrows of yours, and find them grow bigger and bigger, while you grow more and more wretched. All that is mere pride, and sentiment, and folly. On the other hand, look at this. Your husband is sorry you are away from him—you may take that for granted. You say he was merely thoughtless; now he has got something to make him think, and would without doubt come and beg your pardon, if you gave him a chance. I write to him; he comes down here; you kiss and make good friends

again, and to-morrow morning you are comfortable and happy again."

"To-morrow morning?" said Sheila, sadly. "Do you know how we should be situated to-morrow morning? The story of my going away would become known to his friends; he would go among them as though he had suffered some disgrace, and I the cause of it. And though he is a man, and would soon be careless of that, how could I go with him amongst his friends, and feel that I had shamed him? It would be worse than ever between us; and I have no wish to begin again what ended this morning—none at all, Mrs. Lavender."

"And do you mean to say that you intend to live permanently apart from your husband?"

"I do not know," said Sheila, in a despairing tone. "I cannot tell you. What I feel is that, with all this trouble, it is better that our life as it was in that house should come to an end."

Then she rose. There was a tired look about her face, as if she were too weary to care whether this old woman would help her or no. Mrs. Lavender regarded her for a moment, wondering, perhaps, that a girl so handsome, fine-coloured, and proud-eyed, should be distressing herself with imaginary sentiments, instead of taking life cheerfully, enjoying the hour as it passed, and being quite assured of the interest, and liking, and homage of everyone with whom she came in contact. Sheila turned to the bed once more, about to say that she had troubled Mrs. Lavender too much already, and that she would look after these lodgings. But the old woman apparently anticipated as much, and said, with much deliberation, that if Sheila and her companion would only remain one or two days

in the house, proper rooms should be provided for them somewhere. Young girls could not venture into lodgings without strict inquiries being made. Sheila should have suitable rooms; and Mrs. Lavender would see that she was properly looked after, and that she wanted for nothing. In the meantime she must have some money.

"It is kind of you," said the girl, blushing hotly, "but I do not require it."

"Oh, I suppose we are too proud!" said the old woman. "If we disapprove of our husband taking money, we must not do it either. Why, child, you have learnt nothing in London. You are a savage yet. You must let me give you something for your pocket, or what are you to do? You say you have left everything at home; do you think hair-brushes, for example, grow on trees, that you can go into Kensington Gardens and stock your rooms?"

"I have some money—a few pounds—that my papa gave me," Sheila said.

"And when that is done?"

"He will give me more."

"And yet you don't wish him to know you have left your husband's house! What will he make of these repeated demands for money?"

"My papa will give me anything I want, without asking any questions."

"Then he is a bigger fool than I expected. Oh, don't get into a temper again. Those sudden shocks of colour, child, show me that your heart is out of order. How can you expect to have a regular pulsation if you flare up at anything anyone may say? Now go and fetch me your Highland cousin."

Mairi came into the room in a very timid fashion,

and stared with her big, light-blue eyes into the dusky recess in which the little old woman sat up in bed. Sheila took her forward.

"This is my cousin Mairi, Mrs. Lavender."

"And are you ferry well, ma'am?" said Mairi, holding out her hand very much as a boy pretends to hold out his hand to a tiger in the Zoological Gardens.

"Well, young lady," said Mrs. Lavender, staring at her, and a pretty mess *you* have got us into!"

"Me!" said Mairi, almost with a cry of pain: she had not imagined before that she had anything to do with Sheila's trouble.

"No, no, Mairi," her companion said, taking her hand; "it was not you. Mrs. Lavender, Mairi does not understand our way of joking in London. Perhaps she will learn before she goes back to the Highlands."

"There is one thing," said Mrs. Lavender, observing that Mairi's eyes had filled the moment she was charged with bringing trouble on Sheila, "there is one thing you people from the Highlands seem never disposed to learn, and that is, to have a little control over your passions. If one speaks to you a couple of words, you either begin to cry or go off into a flash of rage. Don't you know how bad that is for the health?"

"And yet," said Sheila, with a smile—and it seemed so strange to Mairi to see her smile—"we will not compare badly in health with the people about us here."

Mrs. Lavender dropped the question, and began to explain to Sheila what she advised her to do. In the meantime both the girls were to remain in her house. She would guarantee their being met by no one. When suitable rooms had been looked out by Paterson, they

were to remove thither. The whole situation of affairs was at once perceived by Mrs. Lavender's attendant, who was given to understand that no one was to know of young Mrs. Lavender's being in the house. Then the old woman, much contented with what she had done, resolved that she would reward herself with a joke; and sent for Edward Ingram.

When Sheila, as already described, came into the room, and found her old friend there, the resolution she had formed went clean out of her mind. She forgot entirely the ban that had been placed on Ingram by her husband. But after her first emotion on seeing him was over, and when he began to discuss what she ought to do, and even to advise her in a diffident sort of way, she remembered all that she had forgotten, and was ashamed to find herself sitting there, and talking to him, as if it were in her father's house at Borva. Indeed, when he proposed to take the management of her affairs into his own hands, and to go and look at certain apartments that Paterson had proposed, she was forced, with great heart-burning and pain, to hint to him that she could not avail herself of his kindness.

"But why?" he asked, with a stare of surprise.

"You remember Brighton," she answered, looking down. "You had a bad return for your kindness to me then."

"Oh, I know," he said, carelessly. "And I suppose Mr. Lavender wished you to cut me for my impertinent interference. But things are very much changed now. But for the time he went North, he has been with me nearly every hour since you left."

"Has Frank been to the Lewis?" she said, suddenly, with a look of fear on her face.

"Oh no; he has only been to Glasgow to see if you had gone to catch the *Clansman*, and go North from there."

"Did he take the trouble to do all that?" she asked, slowly and wistfully.

"Trouble!" cried Ingram. "He appears to me neither to eat nor sleep day or night; but to go wandering about in search of you in every place where he fancies you may be. I never saw a man so beside himself with anxiety——"

"I did not wish to make him anxious," said Sheila, in a low voice. "Will you tell him that I am well?"

Mrs. Lavender began to smile. Were there not evident signs of softening? But Ingram, who knew the girl better, was not deceived by these appearances. He could see that Sheila merely wished that her husband should not suffer pain on her account: that was all.

"I was about to ask you," he said, gently, "what I may say to him. He comes to me continually; for he has always fancied that you would communicate with me. What shall I say to him, Sheila?"

"You may tell him that I am well."

Mairi had by this time stepped out of the room. Sheila sat with her eyes fixed on the floor, her fingers working nervously with a paper-knife she held.

"Nothing more than that?" he said.

"Nothing more."

He saw by her face, and he could tell by the sound of her voice, that her decision was resolute.

"Don't be a fool, child," said Mrs. Lavender, emphatically. "Here is your husband's friend, who can make everything straight and comfortable for you in an hour or two, and you quietly put aside the chance of reconciliation, and bring on yourself any amount of misery. I don't speak for Frank. Men can take

care of themselves; they have clubs, and friends, and amusements for the whole day long. But you—what a pleasant life you would have, shut up in a couple of rooms, scarcely daring to show yourself at a window! Your fine sentiments are all very well; but they won't stand in the place of a husband to you; and you will soon find out the difference between living by yourself like that, and having some one in the house to look after you. Am I right, Mr. Ingram, or am I wrong?"

Ingram paused for a moment, and said—

"I have not the same courage that you have, Mrs. Lavender. I dare not advise Sheila one way or the other just at present. But if she feels in her own heart that she would rather return now to her husband, I can safely say that she would find him deeply grateful to her, and that he would try to do everything that she desired. That I know. He wants to see you, Sheila, if only for five minutes—to beg your forgiveness——"

"I cannot see him," she said, with the same sad and settled air.

"I am not to tell him where you are?"

"Oh no!" she cried, with a sudden and startled emphasis. "You must not do that, Mr. Ingram. Promise me you will not do that?"

"I do promise you; but you put a painful duty on me, Sheila; for you know how he will believe that a short interview with you would put everything right, and he will look on me as preventing that."

"Do you think a short interview at present would put everything right?" she said, suddenly looking up, and regarding him with her clear and steadfast eyes.

He dared not answer. He felt in his inmost heart that it would not.

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Lavender, "young people have much satisfaction in being proud; when they come to my age, they may find they would have been happier if they had been less disdainful."

"It is not disdain, Mrs. Lavender," said Sheila, gently.

"Whatever it is," said the old woman, "I must remind you two people that I am an invalid. Go away, and have luncheon. Paterson will look after you. Mr. Ingram, give me that book, that I may read myself into a nap; and don't forget what I expect of you."

Ingram suddenly remembered. He and Sheila and Mairi sat down to luncheon in the dining-room; and, while he strove to get them to talk about Borva, he was thinking all the time of the extraordinary position he was expected to assume towards Sheila. Not only was he to be the repository of the secret of her place of residence, and the message-carrier between herself and her husband; but he was also to take Mrs. Lavender's fortune, in the event of her dying, and hold it in trust for the young wife. Surely this old woman, with her suspicious ways and her worldly wisdom, would not be so foolish as to hand him over all her property, free of conditions, on the simple understanding that when he chose he could give what he chose to Sheila? And yet that was what she had vowed she would do, to Ingram's profound dismay.

He laboured hard to lighten the spirits of those two girls. He talked of John the Piper, and said he would invite him up to London; and described his probable appearance in the Park. He told them stories of his adventures while he was camping out with some young artists in the western Highlands; and told them anecdotes, old, recent, and of his own invention, about the people he had met. Had they heard of the steward

on board one of the Clyde steamers, who had a percentage on the drink consumed in the cabin, and who would call out to the captain, "Why wass you going so fast? Dinna put her into the quay so fast! There is a gran' company down below, and they are drinking fine!" Had he ever told them of the porter at Arran who had demanded sixpence for carrying up some luggage, but who, after being sent to get a sovereign changed, came back with only eighteen shillings, saying, "Oh, yes, it iss sexpence! Oh, aye, it iss sexpence! But it iss two shullens *ta you!*" Or of the other, who, after being paid, hung about the cottage-door for nearly an hour, until Ingram, coming out, asked him why he had waited; whereupon he said, with an air of perfect indifference, "Oo aye, there wass something said about a dram; but hoot toots! it is of no consequence whatever!" And was it true that the Sheriff of Stornoway was so kind-hearted a man that he remitted the punishment of certain culprits, ordained by the statute to be whipped with birch-rods, on the ground that the island of Lewis produced no birch, and that he was not bound to import it? And had Mairi heard any more of the Black Horse of Loch Suainabhal? And where had she pulled those splendid bunches of bell-heather?

He suddenly stopped, and Sheila looked up with inquiring eyes. How did he know that Mairi had brought those things with her? Sheila saw that he must have gone up with her husband, and must have seen the room which she had decorated in imitation of the small parlour at Borvabost. She would rather not think of that room now.

"When are you going to the Lewis?" she asked of him, with her eyes cast down.

"Well, I think I have changed my mind about that, Sheila. I don't think I shall go to the Lewis this autumn."

Her face became more and more embarrassed; how was she to thank him for his continued thoughtfulness and self-sacrifice?

"There is no necessity," he said, lightly. "The man I am going with has no particular purpose in view. We shall merely go cruising about those wonderful lochs and islands; and I am sure to run against some of those young fellows I know, who are prowling about the fishing-villages with portable easels. They are good boys, those boys. They are very hospitable, if they have only a single bed-room in a small cottage as their studio and reception-room combined. I should not wonder, Sheila, if I went ashore somewhere, and put up my lot with those young fellows, and listened to their wicked stories, and live on whisky and herrings for a month. Would you like to see me return to Whitehall in kilts? And I should go into the office, and salute everybody with 'And are you ferry well?' just as Mairi does. But don't be down-hearted, Mairi. You speak English a good deal better than many English folks I know; and by the time you go back to the Lewis, we shall have you fit to become a school-mistress, not only in Borva, but in Stornoway itself."

"I wass told it is ferry good English they hef in Stornoway," said Mairi, not very sure whether Mr. Ingram was joking or not.

"My dear child!" he cried, "I tell you it is the best English in the world. If the Queen only knew, she would send her grandchildren to be educated there. But I must go now. Good-bye, Mairi. I

mean to come and take you to a theatre some night soon."

Sheila accompanied him out into the hall.

"When shall you see him?" she said, with her eyes cast down.

"This evening," he answered.

"I should like you to tell him that I am well, and that he need not be anxious about me."

"And that is all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"Very well, Sheila. I wish you had given me a pleasanter message to carry; but when you think of doing that, I shall be glad to take it."

Ingram left, and hastened in to his office. Sheila's affairs were considerably interfering with his attendance there, there could be no question of that; but he had the reputation of being able to get through his work thoroughly, whatever might be the hours he devoted to it; so that he did not greatly fear being rebuked for his present irregularities. Perhaps, if a grave official warning had been probable, even that would not have interfered much with his determination to do what could be done for Sheila.

But this business of carrying a message to Lavender was the most serious he had as yet undertaken. He had to make sundry and solemn resolves to put a bold face on the matter at the outset, and declare that wild horses would not tear from him any further information. He feared the piteous appeals that might be made to him; the representations that, merely for the sake of an imprudent promise, he was delaying a reconciliation between these two until that might be impossible; the reasons that would be urged on him for considering Sheila's welfare as paramount

to his own scruples. He went through the interview, as he foresaw it, a dozen times over; and constructed replies to each argument and entreaty. Of course it would be simple enough to meet all Lavender's demands with a simple "No;" but there are circumstances in which the heroic method of solving difficulties becomes a trifle inhuman.

He had promised to dine with Lavender that evening at his club. When he went along to St. James's Street at the appointed hour, his host had not arrived. He walked about for ten minutes, and then Lavender appeared, haggard and worn-out with fatigue.

"I have heard nothing—I can hear nothing—I have been everywhere," he said, leading the way at once into the dining-room. "I am sorry I have kept you waiting, Ingram."

They sat down at a small side-table; there were few men in the club at this late season; so that they could talk freely enough when the waiter had come and gone.

"Well, I have some news for you, Lavender," Ingram said.

"Do you know where she is?" said the other, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Where?" he almost called aloud, in his anxiety.

"Well," Ingram said, slowly, "she is in London, and she is very well; and you need have no anxiety about her."

"But where is she?" demanded Lavender, taking no heed of the waiter who was standing by and uncorking a bottle.

"I promised her not to tell you."

"You have spoken with her, then?"

"Yes."

"What did she say? Where has she been? Good heavens, Ingram! you don't mean to say you are going to keep it a secret?"

"Oh no," said the other; "I will tell you everything she said to me, if you like. Only I will not tell you where she is——"

"I will not ask you," said Lavender, at once, "if she does not wish me to know. But you can tell me about herself. What did she say? What was she looking like? Is Mairi with her?"

"Yes, Mairi is with her. And of course she is looking a little troubled, and pale, and so forth; but she is very well, I should think, and quite comfortably situated. She said I was to tell you that she was well, and that you need not be anxious."

"She sent a message to me?"

"That is it."

"By Jove, Ingram! how can I ever thank you enough? I feel as glad just now as if she had really come home again. And how did you manage it?"

Lavender, in his excitement and gratitude, kept filling up his friend's glass the moment the least quantity had been taken out of it; the wonder was he did not fill all the glasses on that side of the table, and beseech Ingram to have two or three dinners all at once.

"Oh, you needn't give me any credit about it," Ingram said. "I stumbled against her by accident—at least, I did not find her out myself."

"Did she send for you?"

"No. But look here, Lavender, this sort of cross-examination will lead to but one thing; and you say yourself you won't try to find out where she is."

"Not from you, anyway. But how can I help

wanting to know where she is? And my aunt was saying just now that very likely she had gone right away to the other end of London—to Peckham, or some such place."

"You have seen Mrs. Lavender, then?"

"I have just come from there. The old heathen thinks the whole affair rather a good joke; but perhaps that was only her way of showing her temper, for she was in a bit of a rage, to be sure. And so Sheila sent me that message?"

"Yes."

"Does she want money? Would you take her some money from me?" he said eagerly. Any bond of union between him and Sheila would be of some value.

"I don't think she needs money; and in any case, I know she wouldn't take it from you."

"Well, now, Ingram, you have seen her, and talked with her. What do you think she intends to do? What do you think she would have me do?"

"These are very dangerous questions for me to answer," Ingram said. "I don't see how you can expect me to assume the responsibility."

"I don't ask you to do that at all. But I never found your advice to fail. And if you give me any hint as to what I should do, I will do it on my own responsibility."

"Then I won't. But this I will do. I will tell you as nearly as ever I can what she said; and you can judge for yourself."

Very cautiously indeed did Ingram set out on this perilous undertaking. It was no easy matter so to shut out all references to Sheila's surroundings, that no hint should be given to this anxious listener as to her whereabouts. But Ingram got through it success-

fully; and when he had finished, Lavender sat some time in silence, merely toying with his knife, for, indeed, he had eaten nothing.

"If it is her wish," he said, slowly, "that I should not go to see her, I will not try to do so. But I should like to know where she is. You say she is comfortable, and she has Mairi for a companion—and that is something. In the meantime, I suppose I must wait."

"I don't see myself how waiting is likely to do much good," said Ingram. "That won't alter your relations much."

"It may alter her determination. A woman is sure to soften into charity and forgiveness. She can't help it."

"If you were to ask Sheila now, she would say she had forgiven you already. But that is a different matter from getting her to resume her former method of life with you. To tell you the truth, I should strongly advise her, if I were to give advice at all, not to attempt anything of the sort. One failure is bad enough, and has wrought sufficient trouble."

"Then what am I to do, Ingram?"

"You must judge for yourself what is the most likely way of winning back Sheila's confidence in you, and the most likely conditions under which she might be induced to join you again. You need not expect to get her back into that Square, I should fancy; *that* experiment has rather broken down."

"Well," said Lavender, "I sha'n't bore you any more just now about my affairs. Look after your dinner, old fellow; your starving yourself won't help me much."

"I don't mean to starve myself at all," said In-

gram, steadily making his way through the abundant dishes his friend had ordered. "But I had a very good luncheon this morning with——"

"With Sheila," Lavender said, quickly.

"Yes. Does it surprise you to find that she is in a place where she can get food? I wish the poor child had made better use of her opportunities."

"Ingram," he said, after a minute, "could you take some money from me, without her knowing of it, and try to get her some of the little things she likes—some delicacies, you know—they might be smuggled in, as it were, without her knowing who had paid for them? There was ice-pudding, you know, with strawberries in it, that she was fond of——"

"My dear fellow, a woman in her position thinks of something else than ice-pudding in strawberries——"

"But why shouldn't she have it all the same? I would give twenty pounds to get some little gratification of that sort conveyed to her; and if you could try, Ingram——"

"My dear fellow, she has got everything she can want: there was no ice-pudding at luncheon, but doubtless there will be at dinner."

So Sheila was staying in a house in which ices could be prepared? Lavender's suggestion had had no cunning intention in it; but here was an obvious piece of information. She was in no humble lodging-house, then. She was either staying with some friends —and she had no friends but Lavender's friends—or she was staying at an hotel. He remembered that she had once dined at the Langham, Mrs. Kavanagh having persuaded her to go to meet some American visitors. Might she have gone thither?

Lavender was somewhat silent during the rest of

that meal; for he was thinking of other things besides the mere question as to where Sheila might be staying. He was trying to imagine what she may have felt before she was driven to this step. He was trying to recall all manner of incidents of their daily life that he now saw might have appeared to her in a very different light from that in which he saw them. He was wondering, too, how all this could be altered; and a new life began for them both, if that were still possible.

They had gone up-stairs into the smoking-room, when a card was brought to Lavender.

"Young Mosenberg is below," he said to Ingram. "He will be a livelier companion for you than I could be. Waiter, ask this gentleman to come up."

The handsome Jew-boy came eagerly into the room, with much excitement visible on his face.

"Oh, do you know," he said to Lavender, "I have found out where Mrs. Lavender is, yes: she is at your aunt's house. I saw her this afternoon—for one moment——"

He stopped; for he saw by the vexation on Ingram's face that he had done something wrong.

"Is it a mistake?" he said. "Is it a secret?"

"It is not likely to be a secret if you have got hold of it," said Ingram, sharply.

"I am very sorry," said the boy. "I thought you were all anxious to know——"

"It does not matter in the least," said Lavender, quietly, to both of them. "I shall not seek to disturb her. I am about to leave London."

"Where are you going," said the boy.

"I don't know yet."

That, at least, had been part of the result of his meditations; and Ingram, looking at him, wondered

whether he meant to go away without trying to say one word to Sheila.

"Look here, Lavender," he said, "you must not fancy we were trying to play any useless and impertinent trick. To-morrow or next day Sheila will leave your aunt's house; and then I should have told you she had been there, and how the old lady received her. It was Sheila's own wish that the lodgings she is going to should not be known. She fancies that would save both of you a great deal of unnecessary and fruitless pain, do you see. That really is her only object in wishing to have any concealment about the matter."

"But there is no need for any such concealment," he said. "You may tell Sheila that if she likes to stay on with my aunt, so much the better; and I take it very kind of her that she went there, instead of going home, or to a strange house."

"Am I to tell her that you mean to leave London?"

"Yes."

They went into the billiard-room. Mosenberg was not permitted to play, as he had not dined in the club; but Ingram and Lavender proceeded to have a game, the former being content to accept something like thirty in a hundred. It was speedily very clear that Lavender's heart was not in the contest. He kept forgetting which ball he had been playing; missing easy shots; playing a perversely wrong game; and so forth. And yet his spirits were not much downcast.

"Is Peter Hewetson still at Tarbert, do you know?" he asked of Ingram.

"I believe so. I heard of him lately. He and one or two more are there."

"I suppose you'll look in on them if you go North?"

"Certain. The place is badly perfumed, but picturesque; and there is generally plenty of whisky about."

"When do you go North?"

"I don't know. In a week or two."

That was all that Lavender hinted of his plans. He went home early that night, and spent an hour or two in packing up some things, and in writing a long letter to his aunt, which was destined considerably to astonish that lady. Then he lay down, and had a few hours' rest.

In the early morning he went out and walked across Kensington Gardens down to the Gore. He wished to have one look at the house in which Sheila was; or perhaps he might, from a distance, see her come out on a simple errand? He knew, for example, that she had a superstitious liking for posting her letters herself; in wet weather or dry, she invariably carried her own correspondence to the nearest pillar-post. Perhaps he might have one glimpse of her face, to see how she was looking, before he left London.

There were few people about; one or two well-known lawyers and merchants were riding by to have their morning canter in the Park; the shops were being opened. Over there was the house—with its dark front of bricks, its hard ivy, and its small windows with formal red curtains—in which Sheila was immured. That was certainly not the palace that a beautiful Sea-Princess should have inhabited. Where were the pine woods around it, and the lofty hills, and the wild beating of the waves on the sands below? And now it seemed strange and sad that just as he was about to go away to the North, and breathe the salt air again, and find the strong west winds

blowing across the mountain peaks and through the furze, Sheila, a daughter of the sea and the rocks, should be hiding herself in obscure lodgings in the heart of a great city. Perhaps—he could not but think at this time—if he had only the chance of speaking to her for a couple of moments he could persuade her to forgive him everything that had happened, and go away with him—away from London and all the associations that had vexed her and almost broke her heart—to the free, and open, and joyous life on the far sea-coasts of the Hebrides.

Something caused him to turn his head for a second, and he knew that Sheila was coming along the pavement, not from, but towards the house. It was too late to think of getting out of her way; and yet he dared not go up to her and speak to her, as he had wished to do. She, too, had seen him. There was a quick, frightened look in her eyes; and then she came along, with her face pale, and her head downcast. He did not seek to interrupt her. His eyes, too, were lowered as she passed him without taking any notice of his presence, although the sad face and the troubled lips told of the pain at her heart. He had hoped, perchance, for one word, for even a sign of recognition; but she went by him calmly, gravely, and silently. She went into the house; and he turned away, with a weight at his heart, as though the gates of heaven had been closed against him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Like Hadrianus and Augustus."

THE island of Borva lay warm, and green, and bright under a blue sky; there were no white curls of

foam on Loch Roag, but only the long Atlantic swell coming in to fall on the white beach; away over there in the south the fine greys and purples of the giant Suainabhal shone in the sunlight amid the clear air; and the beautiful seapyots flew about the rocks, their screaming being the only sound audible in the stillness. The King of Borva was down by the shore, seated on a stool, and engaged in the idyllic operation of painting a boat which had been hauled up on the sand. It was the *Maighdean-mhara*. He would let no one else on the island touch Sheila's boat. Duncan, it is true, was permitted to keep her masts and sails and seats sound and white; but as for the decorative painting of the small craft—including a little bit of amateur gilding—that was the exclusive right of Mr. Mackenzie himself. For of course, the old man said to himself, Sheila was coming back to Borva one of these days; and she would be proud to find her own boat bright and sound. If she and her husband should resolve to spend half the year in Stornoway, would not the small craft be of use to her there, and sure he was that a prettier little vessel never entered Stornoway bay. Mr. Mackenzie was at this moment engaged in putting a thin line of green round the white bulwarks that might have been distinguished across Loch Roag, so keen and pure was the colour.

A much heavier boat, broad-beamed, red-hulled, and brown-sailed, was slowly coming round the point at this moment. Mr. Mackenzie raised his eyes from his work, and knew that Duncan was coming back from Callernish. Some few minutes thereafter, the boat was run in to her moorings, and Duncan came along the beach with a parcel in his hand.

"Here wass your letters, sir," he said. "And there

iss one of them will be from Miss Sheila, if I wass make no mistake."

He remained there. Duncan generally knew pretty well when a letter from Sheila was among the documents he had to deliver; and, on such an occasion, he invariably lingered about to hear the news, which was immediately spread abroad throughout the island. The old King of Borva was not a garrulous man; but he was glad that the people about him should know that his Sheila had become a fine lady in the south, and saw fine things, and went among fine people. Perhaps this notion of his was a sort of apology to them — perhaps it was an apology to himself—for his having let her go away from the island; but at all events the simple folks about Borva knew that Miss Sheila, as they still invariably called her, lived in the same town as the Queen herself, and saw many lords and ladies, and was present at great festivities, as became Mr. Mackenzie's only daughter. And naturally these rumours and stories were exaggerated by the kindly interest and affection of the people into something far beyond what Sheila's father intended; insomuch that many an old crone would proudly and sagaciously wag her head, and say that when Miss Sheila came back to Borva strange things might be seen, and it would be a proud day for Mr. Mackenzie if he was to go down to the shore to meet Queen Victoria herself, and the Princes and Princesses, and many fine people, all come to stay at his house and have great rejoicings in Borva.

Thus it was that Duncan invariably lingered about when he brought a letter from Sheila; and if her father happened to forget, or be pre-occupied, Duncan would humbly but firmly remind him. On this

occasion Mr. Mackenzie put down his paint-brush and took the bundle of letters and newspapers Duncan had brought him. He selected that from Sheila, and threw the others on the beach beside him.

There was really no news in the letter. Sheila merely said that she could not as yet answer her father's question as to the time she might probably visit Lewis. She hoped he was well; and that, if she could not get up to Borva that year, he would come south to London for a time, when the hard weather set in in the north. And so forth. But there was something in the tone of the letter that struck the old man as being unusual and strange. It was very formal in its phraseology. He read it twice over, very carefully, and forgot altogether that Duncan was waiting. Indeed, he was going to turn away, forgetting his work and the other letters that still lay on the beach, when he observed that there was a postscript on the other side of the last page. It merely said—"*Will you please address your letters now to No.—Pembroke Road, South Kensington, where I may be for some time?*"

That was an imprudent postscript. If she had shown the letter to anyone, she would have been warned of the blunder she was committing. But the child had not much cunning; and wrote and posted the letter in the belief that her father would simply do as she asked him, and suspect nothing, and ask no questions.

When old Mackenzie read that postscript, he could only stare at the paper before him.

"Will there be anything wrong, sir?" said the tall keeper, whose keen grey eyes had been fixed on his master's face.

The sound of Duncan's voice startled and recalled Mr. Mackenzie, who immediately turned, and said, lightly—

"Wrong? What wass you thinking would be wrong? Oh, there is nothing wrong whatever. But Mairi, she will be greatly surprised, and she is going to write no letters until she comes back to tell you what she has seen; that is the message there will be for Scarlett. Sheila—she is very well."

Duncan picked up the other letters and newspapers.

"You may tek them to the house, Duncan," said Mr. Mackenzie, and then he added, carelessly, "Did you hear when the steamer was thinking of leaving Stornoway this night?"

"They were saying it would be seven o'clock or six, as there was a great deal of cargo to go on her."

"Six o'clock? I'm thinking, Duncan, I would like to go with her as far as Oban or Glasgow. Oh yes, I will go with her as far as Glasgow. Be sharp, Duncan, and bring in the boat."

The keeper stared, fearing his master had gone mad.

"You wass going with her this ferry night?"

"Yes. Be sharp, Duncan!" said Mackenzie, doing his best to conceal his impatience and determination under a careless air.

"Bit, sir, you canna do it," said Duncan, peevishly. "You hef no things looked out to go. And by the time we would get to Callernish, it wass a ferry hard drive there will be to get to Stornoway by six o'clock; and there is the mare, sir, she will hef lost a shoe——"

Mr. Mackenzie's diplomacy gave way. He turned upon the keeper with a sudden fierceness, and with a stamp of his foot.

"————————you, Duncan MacDonald, is it you or me that is the master? I will go to Stornoway this ferry moment if I hef to buy twenty horses!" And

there was a light under the shaggy eyebrows that warned Duncan to have done with his remonstrances.

"Oh, ferry well, sir—ferry well, sir," he said, going off to the boat, and grumbling as he went. "If Miss Sheila wass here, it would be no going away to Glesca without any things wis you, as if you wass a poor traffelin tailor that hass nothing in the world but a needle and a thimble mirover. And what will the people in Styornoway hef to say, and sa captain of sa steamboat; and Scarlett—I will hef no peace from Scarlett if you wass going away like this. And as for sa sweerin, it is no use sa sweerin, for I will get sa boat ready—oh yes, I will get the boat ready—but I do not understand why I will get sa boat ready."

By this time, indeed, he had got along to the larger boat, and his grumblings were inaudible to the object of them. Mr. Mackenzie went to the small landing-place, and waited. When he got into the boat, and sat down in the stern, taking the tiller in his right hand, he still held Sheila's letter in the other hand, although he did not need to re-read it.

They sailed out into the blue waters of the loch, and rounded the point of the island, in absolute silence, Duncan meanwhile being both sulky and curious. He could not make out why his master should so suddenly leave the island, without informing anyone, without even taking with him that tall and roughly-furred black hat which he ordinarily wore on important occasions. Yet there was a letter in his hand; and it was a letter from Miss Sheila. Was the news about Mairi the only news in it?

Duncan kept looking ahead to see that the boat was steering her right course for the Narrows, and was anxious, now that he had started, to make the

voyage in the least possible time; but all the same his eyes would come back to Mr. Mackenzie, who sat very much absorbed, steering almost mechanically, seldom looking ahead, but instinctively guessing his course by the outlines of the shore close by.

"Wass there any bad news, sir, from Miss Sheila?" he was compelled to say at last.

"Miss Sheila!" said Mr. Mackenzie, impatiently. "Is it an infant you are, that you will call a married woman by such a name?"

Duncan had never been checked before for a habit which was common to the whole island of Borva.

"There iss no bad news," continued Mackenzie, impatiently. "Is it a story you would like to tek back to the people of Borvabost?"

"It was no thought of such a thing wass come into my head, sir," said Duncan. "There is no one in sa island would like to carry bad news about Miss Sheila; and there iss no one in sa island would like to hear it—not anyone whatever; and I can answer for that."

"Then hold your tongue about it—there is no bad news from Sheila," said Mackenzie; and Duncan relapsed into silence, not very well content.

By dint of very hard driving indeed Mr. Mackenzie just caught the boat as she was leaving Stornoway harbour; the hurry he was in fortunately saving him from the curiosity and inquiries of the people he knew on the pier. As for the frank and good-natured captain, he did not show that excessive interest in Mr. Mackenzie's affairs that Duncan had feared; but when the steamer was well away from the coast, and bearing down on her route to Skye, he came and had a chat with the King of Borva about the condition of affairs on the west of the island, and he was good

enough to ask, too, about the young lady who had married the English gentleman. Mr. Mackenzie said briefly that she was very well; and returned to the subject of the fishing.

It was on a wet and dreary morning that Mr. Mackenzie arrived in London; and as he was slowly driven through the long and dismal thoroughfares, with their grey and melancholy houses, their passers-by under umbrellas, and their smoke, and drizzle, and dirt, he could not help saying to himself, "My poor Sheila!" It was not a pleasant place surely to live in always, although it might be all very well for a visit. Indeed, this cheerless day added to the gloomy forebodings in his mind; and it needed all his resolve, and his pride in his own diplomacy, to carry out his plan of approaching Sheila.

When he got to Pembroke Road, he stopped the cab at the corner, and paid the man. Then he walked along the thoroughfare, having a look at the houses. At length he came to the number mentioned in Sheila's letter, and he found that there was a brass plate on the door bearing an unfamiliar name. His suspicions were confirmed. He went up the steps and knocked; a small girl answered the summons.

"Is Mrs. Lavender living here?" he said.

She looked for a moment with some surprise at the short, thick-set man, with his sailor costume, his peaked cap, and his great grey beard and shaggy eyebrows; and then she said that she would ask, and what was his name? But Mr. Mackenzie was too sharp not to know what that meant.

"I am her father. It will do ferry well if you will show me the room."

And he stepped inside. The small girl obediently

shut the door, and then led the way upstairs. The next minute Mr. Mackenzie had entered the room, and there, before him, was Sheila, bending over Mairi, and teaching her how to do some fancy-work.

The girl looked up, on hearing some one enter, and then, when she suddenly saw her father there, she uttered a slight cry of alarm, and shrunk back. If he had been less intent on his own plans, he would have been amazed and pained by this action on the part of his daughter, who used to run to him, on great occasions and small, whenever she saw him; but the girl had for the last few days been so habitually schooling herself into the notion that she was keeping a secret from him—she had become so deeply conscious of the concealment intended in that brief letter—that she instinctively shrank from him when he suddenly appeared. It was but for a moment. Mr. Mackenzie came forward, with a fine assumption of carelessness, and shook hands with Sheila and with Mairi, and said—

"How do you do, Mairi? And are you ferry well, Sheila? And you will not expect me this morning; but when a man will not pay you what he wass owing, it was no good letting it go on in that way, and I hef come to London——"

He shook the rain-drops from his cap, and was a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I hef come to London to have an account settled up; for it wass no good letting the man go on for effer and effer. Ay, and how are you, Sheila?"

He glanced about the room—he would not look at her. She stood there, unable to speak, and with her face grown wild and pale.

"Ay, it wass raining hard all the last night, and there was a good deal of water came into the carriage;

and it is a ferry hard bed you will make of a third-class carriage. Ay, it wass so. And this is a new house you will hef, Sheila——"

She had been coming nearer to him, with her face down, and the speechless lips trembling. And then suddenly, with a strange sob, she threw herself into his arms, and hid her head, and burst into a wild fit of crying.

"Sheila," he said, "what ails you? What iss all the matter?"

Mairi had covertly got out of the room.

"Oh, papa, I have left him," the girl cried.

"Ay," said her father, quite cheerfully, "oh ay, I thought there was some little thing wrong when your letter wass come to us the other day. But it is no use making a great deal of trouble about it, Sheila; for it is easy to have all those things put right again —oh yes, ferry easy. And you hef left your own home, Sheila? And where is Mr. Lavender?"

"Oh, papa," she cried, "you must not try to see him. You must promise not to go to see him. I should have told you everything when I wrote, but I thought you would come up, and blame it all on him, and I think it is I who am to blame——"

"But I do not want to blame anyone," said her father. "You must not make so much of these things, Sheila. It is a pity—yes, it is a ferry great pity—your husband and you will hef a quarrel; but it iss no uncommon thing for these troubles to happen; and I am coming to you this morning, not to make any more trouble, but to see if it cannot be put right again. And I do not want to know any more than that; and I will not blame anyone; but if I wass to see Mr. Lavender——"

A bitter anger had filled his heart from the moment

he had learned how matters stood; and yet he was talking in such a bland, matter-of-fact, almost cheerful fashion, that his own daughter was imposed upon, and began to grow comforted. The mere fact that her father now knew of all her troubles, and was not disposed to take a very gloomy view of them, was of itself a great relief to her. And she was greatly pleased, too, to hear her father talk in the same light and even friendly fashion of her husband. She had dreaded the possible results of her writing home and relating what had occurred. She knew the powerful passion of which this lonely old man was capable; and if he had come suddenly down south, with a wild desire to revenge the wrongs of his daughter, what might not have happened?

Sheila sat down, and with averted eyes told her father the whole story, ingenuously making all possible excuses for her husband, and intimating strongly that the more she looked over the history of the past time, the more she was convinced that she was herself to blame. It was but natural that Mr. Lavender should like to live in the manner to which he had been accustomed. She had tried to live that way, too; and the failure to do so was surely her fault. He had been very kind to her. He was always buying her new dresses, jewellery, and what not; and was always pleased to take her to be amused anywhere. All this she said, and a great deal more; and although Mr. Mackenzie did not believe the half of it, he did not say so.

"Ay, ay, Sheila," he said, cheerfully, "but if everything was right like that, what for will you be here?"

"But everything was not right, papa," the girl said, still with her eyes cast down. "I could not live any

longer like that; and I had to come away. That is my fault; and I could not help it. And there was a—a misunderstanding between us about Mairi's visit—for I had said nothing about it—and he was surprised—and he had some friends coming to see us that day——"

"Oh, well, there iss no great harm done—none at all," said her father lightly, and perhaps beginning to think that after all something was to be said on Lavender's side of the question. "And you will not suppose, Sheila, that I am coming to make any trouble by quarrelling with anyone. There are some men—oh yes, there are ferry many—that would hef no judgment at such a time, and they would think only about their daughter, and hef no regard for anyone else, and they would only make effery one angrier than before. But you will tell me, Sheila, where Mr. Lavender is——"

"I do not know," she said. "And I am anxious, papa, you should not go to see him. I have asked you to promise that to please me."

He hesitated. There were not many things he could refuse his daughter; but he was not sure he ought to yield to her in this. For were not these two a couple of foolish young things, who wanted an experienced, and cool, and shrewd person to come with a little dexterous management and arrange their affairs for them?

"I do not think I have half explained the difference between us," said Sheila, in the same low voice. "It is no passing quarrel to be mended up and forgotten—it is nothing like that. You must leave it alone, papa."

"That is foolishness, Sheila," said the old man, with a little impatience. "You are making big things

out of ferry little; and you will only bring trouble to yourself. How do you know but that he wishes to hef all this misunderstanding removed, and hef you go back to him?"

"I know that he wishes that," she said, calmly.

"And you speak as if you wass in great trouble here, and yet you will not go back?" he said, in great surprise.

"Yes, that is so," she said. "There is no use in my going back to the same sort of life: it was not happiness for either of us—and to me it was misery. If I am to blame for it, that is only a misfortune."

"But if you will not go back to him, Sheila," her father said, "at least you will go back with me to Borva."

"I cannot do that either," said the girl, with the same quiet yet decisive manner.

Mr. Mackenzie rose, with an impatient gesture, and walked to the window. He did not know what to say. He was very well aware that when Sheila had resolved upon anything, she had thought it well over beforehand, and was not likely to change her mind. And yet the notion of his daughter living in lodgings in a strange town—her only companion a young girl who had never been in the place before—was vexatiously absurd.

"Sheila," he said, "you will come to a better understanding about that. I suppose you wass afraid the people would wonder at your coming back alone. But they will know nothing about it. Mairi she is a ferry good lass; she will do anything you will ask of her; you hef no need to think she will carry stories. And everyone wass thinking you will be coming to the Lewis this year, and it is ferry glad they will be to see

you; and if the house at Borvabost has not enough amusement for you, after you hef been in a big town like this, you will live in Stornoway with some of our friends there, and you will come over to Borva when you please."

"If I went up to the Lewis," said Sheila, "do you think I could live anywhere but in Borva? It is not any amusements I will be thinking about. But I cannot go back to the Lewis alone."

Her father saw how the pride of the girl had driven her to this decision; and saw, too, how useless it was for him to reason with her just at the present moment. Still there was plenty of occasion here for the use of a little diplomacy, merely to smooth the way for the reconciliation of husband and wife; and Mr. Mackenzie concluded in his own mind that it was far from injudicious to allow Sheila to convince herself that she bore part of the blame of this separation. For example, he now proposed that the discussion of the whole question should be postponed for the present; and that Sheila should take him about London and show him all that she had learned; and he suggested that they should then and there get a hansom cab and drive to some exhibition or other.

"A hansom, papa?" said Sheila. "Mairi must go with us, you know."

This was precisely what he had angled for; and he said, with a show of impatience—

"Mairi; how can we take about Mairi to every place? Mairi is a ferry good lass—oh, yes—but she is a servant-lass."

The words nearly stuck in his throat; and, indeed, had any other addressed such a phrase to one of his kith and kin there would have been an explosion

of rage; but now he was determined to show to Sheila that her husband had some cause for objecting to this girl sitting down with his friends.

But neither husband nor father could make Sheila forswear allegiance to what her own heart told her was just, and honourable, and generous; and indeed her father at this moment was not displeased to see her turn round on himself, with just a touch of indignation in her voice.

"Mairi is my guest, papa," she said. "It is not like you to think of leaving her at home."

"Oh, it wass of no consequence," said old Mackenzie, carelessly—indeed he was not sorry to have met with this rebuff. "Mairi is a ferry good girl—oh, yes—but there are many who would not forget she is a servant-lass, and would not like to be always taking her with them. And you hef lived a long time in London——"

"I have not lived long enough in London to make me forget my friends, or insult them," Sheila said, with proud lips, and yet turning to the window to hide her face.

"My lass, I did not mean any harm whatever," her father said, gently; "I was saying nothing against Mairi. Go away and bring her into the room, Sheila; and we will see what we can do now, and if there is a theatre we can go to this evening. And I must go out, too, to buy some things; for you are a ferry fine lady now, Sheila, and I was coming away in such a hurry——"

"Where is your luggage, papa?" she said, suddenly.

"Oh, luggage?" said Mackenzie, looking round in great embarrassment. "It wass luggage you said, Sheila? Ay, well, it wass a hurry I wass in when I came away—for this man he will hef to pay me at once whatever—and there was no time for any luggage

—oh no, there was no time, because Duncan he wass late with the boat, and the mare she had a shoe to put on—and—and—oh no, there wass no time for any luggage."

"But what was Scarlett about, to let you come away like that?" Sheila said.

"Scarlett? Well, Scarlett did not know—it was all in such a hurry. Now go and bring in Mairi, Sheila; and we will speak about the theatre."

But there was to be no theatre for any of them that evening. Sheila was just about to leave the room to summon Mairi, when the small girl who had let Mackenzie into the house appeared and said—

"Please m'm, there is a young woman below who wishes to see you. She has a message to you from Mrs. Paterson."

"Mrs. Paterson?" Sheila said, wondering how Mrs. Lavender's henchwoman should have been entrusted with any such commission. "Will you ask her to come up?"

The girl came up stairs, looking rather frightened, and much out of breath.

"Please m'm, Mrs. Paterson has sent me to tell you, and would you please come as soon as it is convenient. Mrs. Lavender has died. It was quite sudden—only she recovered a little after the fit, and then sank; the doctor is there now; but he wasn't in time, it was all so sudden. Will you please come round, m'm?"

"Yes—I shall be there directly," said Sheila, too bewildered and stunned to think of the possibility of meeting her husband there.

The girl left; and Sheila still stood in the middle of the room apparently stupefied. That old woman had got into such a habit of talking about her ap-

proaching death that Sheila had ceased to believe her, and had grown to fancy that these morbid speculations were indulged in chiefly for the sake of shocking bystanders. But a dead man or a dead woman is suddenly invested with a great solemnity; and Sheila, with a pang of remorse, thought of the fashion in which she had suspected this old woman of a godless hypocrisy. She felt, too, that she had unjustly disliked Mrs. Lavender—that she had feared to go near her, and blamed her unfairly for many things that had happened. In her own way that old woman in Kensington Gore had been kind to her; perhaps the girl was a little ashamed of herself at this moment that she did not cry.

Her father went out with her and up to the house with the dusty ivy and the red curtains. How strangely like was the aspect of the house inside to the very picture that Mrs. Lavender had herself drawn of her death. Sheila could remember all the ghastly details that the old woman seemed to have a malicious delight in describing, and here they were—the shutters drawn down, the servants walking about on tiptoe, the strange silence in one particular room. The little shrivelled old body lay quite still and calm now; and yet as Sheila went to the bedside, she could hardly believe that within that forehead there was not some consciousness of the scene around. Lying almost in the same position the old woman, with a sardonic smile on her face, had spoken of the time when she should be speechless, sightless, and deaf, while Paterson would go about stealthily as if she was afraid the corpse would hear. Was it possible to believe that the dead body was not conscious at this moment that Paterson was really going about in that fashion—that the blinds were down, friends standing some little

distance from the bed, a couple of doctors talking to each other in the passage outside?

They went into another room, and then Sheila, with a sudden shiver, remembered that soon her husband would be coming, and might meet her and her father there.

"You have sent for Mr. Lavender?" she said, calmly, to Mrs. Paterson.

"No, ma'am," Paterson said, with more than her ordinary gravity and formality. "I did not know where to send for him. He left London some days ago. Perhaps you would read the letter, ma'am."

She offered Sheila an open letter. The girl saw that it was in her husband's handwriting; but she shrank from it as though she were violating the secrets of the grave.

"Oh no," she said, "I cannot do that."

"Mrs. Lavender, ma'am, meant you to read it, after she had had her will altered. She told me so. It is a very sad thing, ma'am, that she did not live to carry out her intentions; for she has been inquiring, ma'am, these last few days as to how she could leave everything to you, ma'am, which she intended, and now the other will——"

"Oh, don't talk about that!" said Sheila. I tseemed to her that the dead body in the other room would be laughing hideously, if only it could, at this fulfilment of all the sardonic prophecies that Mrs. Lavender used to make.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," Paterson said, in the same formal way, as if she were a machine set to work in a particular direction, "I only mentioned the will to explain why Mrs. Lavender wished you to read this letter."

"Read the letter, Sheila," said her father.

The girl took it and carried it to the window. While she was there, old Mackenzie, who had fewer scruples about such matters, and who had the curiosity natural to a man of the world, said to Mrs. Paterson —not loud enough for Sheila to overhear—

"I suppose, then, the poor old lady has left her property to her nephew?"

"Oh no, sir," said Mrs. Paterson, somewhat sadly, for she fancied she was the bearer of bad news. "She had a will drawn out only a short time ago, and nearly everything is left to Mr. Ingram."

"To Mr. Ingram?"

"Yes," said the woman, amazed to see that Mackenzie's face, so far from evincing displeasure, seemed to be as delighted as it was surprised.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Paterson, "I was one of the witnesses. But Mrs. Lavender changed her mind; and was very anxious that everything should go to your daughter, if it could be done, and Mr. Appleyard, sir, was to come here to-morrow forenoon."

"And has Mr. Lavender got no money whatever?" said Sheila's father, with an air that convinced Mrs. Paterson that he was a revengeful man, and was glad that his son-in-law should be so severely punished.

"I don't know, sir," she replied, careful not to go beyond her own sphere.

Sheila came back from the window. She had taken a long time to read and ponder over that letter; though it was not a lengthy one. This was what Frank Lavender had written to his aunt:—"My dear Aunt Lavender,—I suppose when you read this you will think I am in a bad temper because of what you said to me. It is not so. But I am leaving London;

and I wish to hand over to you before I go the charge of my house, and to ask you to take possession of everything in it that does not belong to Sheila. These things are yours, as you know; and I have to thank you very much for the loan of them. I have to thank you for the far too liberal allowance you have made me for many years back. Will you think I have gone mad if I ask you to stop that now? The fact is, I am going to have a try at earning something, for the fun of the thing; and, to make the experiment satisfactory, I start to-morrow morning for a district in the West Highlands, where the most ingenious fellow I know couldn't get a penny-loaf on credit. You have been very good to me, Aunt Lavender; I wish I had made a better use of your kindness. So good-bye just now, and if ever I come back to London again I shall call on you and thank you in person.

"I am, your affectionate nephew,

"FRANK LAVENDER."

So far the letter was almost business-like. There was no reference to the causes which were sending him away from London, and which had already driven him to this extraordinary resolution about the money he got from his aunt. But at the end of the letter there was a brief postscript, apparently written at the last moment, the words of which were these:—

"Be kind to Sheila. Be as kind to her as I have been cruel to her. In going away from her I feel as though I were exiled by man and forsaken by God."

She came back from the window with the letter in her hand.

"I think you may read it, too, Papa," she said; for she was anxious that her father should know that Lavender had voluntarily surrendered this money before he was deprived of it. Then she went back to the window.

The slow rain fell from the dismal skies, on the pavement and the railings, and the now almost leafless trees. The atmosphere was filled with a thin white mist, and the people going by were hidden under umbrellas. It was a dreary picture enough; and yet Sheila was thinking of how much drearier such a day would be on some lonely coast in the north, with the hills obscured behind the rain, and the sea beating hopelessly on the sand. She thought of some small and damp Highland cottage, with narrow windows, a smell of wet wood about, and the monotonous drip from over the door. And it seemed to her that a stranger there would be very lonely, not knowing the ways or the speech of the simple folk, careless perhaps of his own comfort, and only listening to the plashing of the sea and the incessant rain on the bushes and on the pebbles of the beach. Was there any picture of desolation, she thought, like that of a sea under rain, with a slight fog obscuring the air, and with no wind to stir the pulse with the noise of waves? And if Frank Lavender had only gone as far as the Western Highlands, and was living in some house on the coast, how sad and still the Atlantic must have been all this wet forenoon, with the islands of Colonsay and Oronsay lying remote, and grey, and misty in the far and desolate plain of the sea.

"It will take a great deal of responsibility from me, sir," Mrs. Paterson said to old Mackenzie, who was absently thinking of all the strange possibilities

now opening out before him, "if you will tell me what is to be done. Mrs. Lavender had no relatives in London, except her nephew."

"Oh yes," said Mackenzie, waking up; "oh yes; we will see what is to be done. There will be the boat wanted for the funeral——"

He recalled himself with an impatient gesture.

"Bless me," he said, "what was I saying? You must ask some one else—you must ask Mr. Ingram. Hef you not sent for Mr. Ingram?"

"Oh yes, sir, I have sent to him; and he will most likely come in the afternoon."

"Then there are the executors mentioned in the will—that wass something you should know about; and they will tell you what to do. As for me, it is ferry little I will know about such things."

"Perhaps your daughter, sir," suggested Mrs. Paterson, "would tell me what she thinks should be done with the rooms——And as for luncheon, sir, if you would wait——"

"Oh, my daughter?" said Mr. Mackenzie, as if struck by a new idea, but determined all the same that Sheila should not have this new responsibility thrust on her. "My daughter?—well, you wass saying, mem, that my daughter would help you? Oh yes, but she is a ferry young thing, and you wass saying we must hef luncheon? Oh yes, but we will not give you so much trouble, and we hef luncheon ordered at the other house whatever; and there is the young girl there that we cannot leave all by herself. And you hef a great experience, mem, and whatever you do, that will be right; do not have any fear of that. And I will come round when you want me—oh yes, I will come round at any time; but my daughter, she is a

ferry young thing, and she would be of no use to you whatever—none whatever. And when Mr. Ingram comes you will send him round to the place where my daughter is, for we will want to see him, if he hass the time to come. But where is Sheila?"

Sheila had quietly left the room and stolen into the silent chamber in which the dead woman lay. They found her standing close by the bedside, almost in a trance.

"Sheila," said her father, taking her hand, "come away now, like a good girl. It is no use your waiting here; and Mairi—what will Mairi be doing?"

She suffered herself to be led away; and they went home and had luncheon, but the girl could not eat for the notion that somewhere or other a pair of eyes were looking at her, and were hideously laughing at her, as if to remind her of the prophecy of that old woman, that her friends would sit down to a comfortable meal and begin to wonder what sort of mourning they would have.

It was not until the evening that Ingram called. He had been greatly surprised to hear from Mrs. Paterson that Mr. Mackenzie had been there, along with his daughter; and he now expected to find the old King of Borva in a towering passion. He found him, on the contrary, as bland and as pleased as decency would admit of in view of the tragedy that had occurred in the morning; and, indeed, as Mackenzie had never seen Mrs. Lavender, there was less reason why he should wear the outward semblance of grief. Sheila's father asked her to go out of the room for a little while; and when she and Mairi had gone, he said cheerfully—

"Well, Mr. Ingram, and it is a rich man you are at last."

"Mrs. Paterson said she had told you," Ingram said, with a shrug. "You never expected to find me rich, did you?"

"Never," said Mackenzie, frankly. "But it is a ferry good thing—oh yes, it is a ferry good thing—to hef money and be independent of people. And you will make a good use of it, I know."

"You don't seem disposed, sir, to regret that Lavender has been robbed of what should have belonged to him?"

"Oh, not at all," said Mackenzie, gravely and cautiously, for he did not want his plans to be displayed prematurely. "But I hef no quarrel with him; so you will not think I am glad to hef the money taken away for that. Oh no; I hef seen a great many men and women; and it wass no strange thing that these two young ones living all by themselves in London, should hef a quarrel. But it will come all right again if we do not make too much about it. If they like one another, they will soon come together again, tek my word for it, Mr. Ingram; and I hef seen a great many men and women. And as for the money —well, as for the money, I hef plenty for my Sheila, and she will not starve when I die, no, nor before that either; and as for the poor old woman that has died, I am ferry glad she left her money to one that will make a good use of it, and will not throw it away whatever."

"Oh, but you know, Mr. Mackenzie, you are congratulating me without cause. I must tell you how the matter stands. The money does not belong to me at all—Mrs. Lavender never intended it should. It was meant to go to Sheila——"

"Oh, I know, I know," said Mr. Mackenzie, with a

wave of his hand. "I wass hearing all that from the woman at the house. But how will you know what Mrs. Lavender intended? You hef only that woman's story of it. And here is the will, and you hef the money, and—and——"

Mackenzie hesitated for a moment; and then said with a sudden vehemence—

"——and, by Kott, you shall keep it!"

Ingram was a trifle startled.

"But look here, sir," he said, in a tone of expostulation, "you make a mistake. I myself know Mrs. Lavender's intentions. I don't go by any story of Mrs. Paterson's. Mrs. Lavender made over the money to me with express injunctions to place it at the disposal of Sheila whenever I should see fit. Oh, there's no mistake about it, so you need not protest, sir. If the money belonged to me, I should be delighted to keep it. No man in the country more desires to be rich than I; so don't fancy I am flinging away a fortune out of generosity. If any rich and kind-hearted old lady will send me £5,000 or £10,000, you will see how I shall stick to it. But the simple truth is, this money is not mine at all. It was never intended to be mine. It belongs to Sheila."

Ingram talked in a very matter-of-fact way; the old man feared what he said was true.

"Ay, it is a ferry good story," said Mackenzie, cautiously, "and may be it is all true. And you wass saying you would like to hef money?"

"I most decidedly should like to have money."

"Well, then," said the old man, watching his friend's face, "there iss no one to say that the story is true; and who will believe it? And if Sheila wass to come to you and say she did not believe it, and she

would not hef the money from you, you would hef to keep it, eh?"

Ingram's sallow face blushed crimson.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, stiffly. "Do you propose to pervert the girl's mind, and make me a party to a fraud?"

"Oh, there is no use getting into an anger," said Mackenzie, suavely, "when common sense will do as well whatever. And there wass no perversion, and there wass no fraud talked about. It wass just this, Mr. Ingram, that if the old lady's will leaves you her property, who will you be getting to believe that she did not mean to give it to you?"

"I tell you now whom she meant to give it to," said Ingram, still somewhat hotly.

"Oh yes, oh yes, that is ferry well. But who will believe it?"

"Good heavens, sir, who will believe I could be such a fool as to fling away this property if it belonged to me?"

"They will think you a fool to do it now—yes, that is sure enough," said Mackenzie.

"I don't care what they think. And it seems rather odd, Mr. Mackenzie, that you should be trying to deprive your own daughter of what belongs to her."

"Oh, my daughter is ferry well off whatever—she does not want anyone's money," said Mackenzie; and then a new notion struck him. "Will you tell me this, Mr. Ingram? If Mrs. Lavender left you her property in this way, what for did she want to change her will, eh?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I refused to take the responsibility. She was anxious to have this money given to Sheila so that Lavender should not touch it —and I don't think it was a wise intention, for there is not a prouder man in the world than Lavender, and

I know that Sheila would not consent to hold a penny that did not equally belong to him. However, that was her notion; and I was the first victim of it. I protested against it; and I suppose that set her to inquiring whether the money could not be absolutely bequeathed to Sheila direct. I don't know anything about it myself; but that's how the matter stands as far as I'm concerned."

"But you will think it over, Mr. Ingram," said Mackenzie quietly; "you will think it over and be in no hurry. It is not every man that hass a lot of money given to him. And it is no wrong to my Sheila at all: for she will hef quite plenty; and she would be ferry sorry to take the money away from you, that is sure enough; and you will not be hasty, Mr. Ingram, but be cautious and reasonable, and you will see the money will do you far more good than it would do to my Sheila."

Ingram began to think that he had tied a millstone round his neck.

CHAPTER IX.

In Exile.

One evening, in the olden time, Lavender and Sheila and Ingram and old Mackenzie were all sitting high up on the rocks near Borvabost, chatting to each other, and watching the red light pale on the bosom of the Atlantic as the sun sank behind the edge of the world. Ingram was smoking a wooden pipe. Lavender sat with Sheila's hand in his. The old King of Borva was discoursing of the fishing populations round the western coasts, and of their various ways and habits.

"I wish I could have seen Tarbert," Lavender was saying, "but the *Iona* just passes the mouth of the little harbour as she comes up Loch Fyne. I know

two or three men who go there every year to paint the fishing life of the place. It is an odd little place, isn't it?"

"Tarbert?" said Mr. Mackenzie; "you wass wanting to know about Tarbert? Ah, well, it is getting to be a better place now, but a year or two ago it wass ferry like hell. Oh, yes, it wass, Sheila, so you need not say anything. And this wass the way of it, Mr. Lavender, that the trawling was not made legal then, and the men they were just like teffles, with the swearing, and the drinking, and the fighting that went on; and if you went into the harbour in the open day, you would find them drunk, and fighting, and some of them with blood on their faces, for it wass a ferry wild time. It wass many a one will say that the Tarbert men would run down the police-boat some dark night. And what wass the use of catching the trawlers now and again, and taking their boats and their nets to be sold at Greenock, when they would go themselves over to Greenock, to the auction, and buy them back? Oh, it wass a great deal of money they made then—I hef heard of a crew of eight men getting £30 each man in the course of one night, and that not seldom mirover."

"But why didn't the Government put it down?" Lavender asked.

"Well, you see," Mackenzie answered, with the air of a man well acquainted with the difficulties of ruling; "you see that it wass not quite sure that the trawling did much harm to the fishing. And the *Jackal* —that wass the Government steamer—she wass not much good in getting the better of the Tarbert men, who are ferry good with their boats in the rowing, and are ferry cunning whatever. For the buying boats they would go out to sea, and take the herring there,

and then the trawlers they would sink their nets and come home in the morning as if they had not caught one fish, although the boat would be white with the scales of the herring. And what is more, sir, the Government knew ferry well that if trawling wass put down then, there would be a ferry good many murders; for the Tarbert men, when they came home to drink whisky, and wash the whisky down with porter, they were ready to fight anybody."

"It must be a delightful place to live in," Lavender said.

"Oh, but it is ferry different now," Mackenzie continued, "ferry different. The men they are nearly all Good Templars now, and there is no drinking whatever, and there is reading-rooms and such things, and the place is ferry quiet and respectable."

"I hear," Ingram remarked, "that good people attribute the change to moral suasion, and that wicked people put it down to want of money."

"Papa, this boy will have to be put to bed," Sheila said.

"Well," Mackenzie answered, "there is not so much money in the place as there wass in the old times. The shopkeepers do not make so much money as before, when the men were wild and drunk in the daytime, and had plenty to spend when the police-boat did not catch them. But the fishermen they are ferry much better without the money; and I can say for them, Mr. Lavender, that there is no better fishermen on the coast. They are ferry fine, tall men; and they are ferry well dressed in their blue clothes; and they are manly fellows, whether they are drunk or whether they are sober. Now look at this, sir, that in the worst of weather they will neffer tek whisky with them when they

go out to the sea at night, for they think it is cowardly. And they are ferry fine fellows and gentlemanly in their ways, and they are ferry good-natured to strangers."

"I have heard that of them on all hands," Lavender said, "and some day I hope to put their civility and good fellowship to the proof."

That was merely the idle conversation of a summer evening; no one paid any further attention to it, nor did even Lavender himself think again of his vaguely-expressed hope of some day visiting Tarbert. Let us now shift the scene of this narrative to Tarbert itself.

When you pass from the broad and blue waters of Loch Fyne into the narrow and rocky channel leading to Tarbert harbour, you find before you an almost circular bay, round which stretches an irregular line of white houses. There is an abundance of fishing-craft in the harbour, lying in careless and picturesque groups, with their brown hulls and spars sending a ruddy reflection down on the lapping water, which is green under the shadow of each boat. Along the shore stand the tall poles on which the fishermen dry their nets; and above these, on the summit of a rocky crag, rise the ruins of an old castle, with the daylight shining through the empty windows. Beyond the houses, again, lie successive lines of hills, at this moment lit up by shafts of sunlight that lend a glowing warmth and richness to the fine colours of a late autumn. The hills are red and brown with rusted bracken and heather; and here and there the smooth waters of the bay catch a tinge of their varied hues. In one of the fishing-smacks that lie almost underneath the shadow of the tall crag on which the castle ruins stand, an artist has put up a rough-and-ready easel, and is apparently busy at work painting a group of boats just beyond. Some

indication of the rich colours of the craft—their ruddy sails, brown nets and bladders, and their varnished but not painted hulls—already appears on the canvas; and by and by some vision may arise of the far hills in their soft autumnal tints and of the bold blue and white sky moving overhead. Perhaps the old man who is smoking in the stern of one of the boats has been placed there on purpose. A boy seated on some nets occasionally casts an anxious glance towards the painter, as if to inquire when his penance will be over.

A small open boat, with a heap of stones for ballast, and with no great elegance in shape of rigging, comes slowly in from the mouth of the harbour, and is gently run alongside the boat in which the man is painting. A fresh-coloured young fellow, with plenty of curly brown hair, who has dressed himself as a yachtsman, calls out—

"Lavender, do you know the *White Rose*, a big schooner yacht, about eighty tons I should think?"

"Yes," Lavender said, without turning round or taking his eyes off the canvas.

"Whose is she?"

"Lord Newstead's."

"Well, either he or his skipper hailed me just now and wanted to know whether you were here. I said you were. The fellow asked me if I was going into the harbour. I said I was. So he gave me a message for you; that they would hang about outside for half an hour or so, if you would go out to them, and take a run up to Ardishaig."

"I can't, Johnny."

"I'd take you out, you know."

"I don't want to go."

"But look here, Lavender," said the younger man

seizing hold of Lavender's boat, and causing the easel to shake dangerously; "he asked me to luncheon, too."

"Why don't you go, then?" was the only reply, uttered rather absently.

"I can't go without you."

"Well, I don't mean to go."

The younger man looked vexed for a moment, and then said, in a tone of expostulation—

"You know it is very absurd of you going on like this, Lavender. No fellow can paint decently if he gets out of bed in the middle of the night and waits for daylight to rush up to his easel. How many hours have you been at work already to-day? If you don't give your eyes a rest, they will get colour-blind to a dead certainty. Do you think you will paint the whole place off the face of the earth, now that the other fellows have gone?"

"I can't be bothered talking to you, Johnny. You'll make me throw something at you. Go away."

"I think it's rather mean, you know," continued the persistent Johnny, "for a fellow like you, who doesn't need it, to come and fill the market all at once, while we unfortunate devils can scarcely get a crust. And there are two heron just round the point, and I have my breechloader and a dozen cartridges here."

"Go away, Johnny,"—that was all the answer he got.

"I'll go out and tell Lord Newstead that you are a cantankerous brute. I suppose he'll have the decency to offer me luncheon; and I dare say I could get him a shot at these heron. You are a fool not to come, Lavender;" and, so saying, the young man put out again, and he was heard to go away talking to himself about obstinate idiots, and greed, and the certainty of getting a shot at the heron.

When he had quite gone, Lavender, who had scarcely raised his eyes from his work, suddenly put down his palette and brushes—he almost dropped them, indeed—and quickly put up both his hands to his head, pressing them on the side of his temples. The old fisherman in the boat beyond noticed this strange movement, and forthwith caught a rope, hauled the boat across a stretch of water, and then came scrambling over bowsprits, lowered sails, and nets, to where Lavender had just sat down.

"Wass there anything the matter, sir?" he said, with much evidence of concern.

"My head is a little bad, Donald," Lavender said, still pressing his hands on his temple, as if to get rid of some strange feeling; "I wish you would pull in to the shore and get me some whisky."

"Oh ay," said the old man, hastily scrambling into the little black boat lying beside the smack; "and it is no wonder to me this will come to you, sir, for I hef never seen any of the gentlemen so long at the pentin as you—from the morning till the night—and it is no wonder to me this will come to you. But I will get you the whushkey—it is a grand thing, the whushkey."

The old fisherman was not long in getting ashore, and running up to the cottage in which Lavender lived, and getting a bottle of whisky and a glass. Then he got down to the boat again, and was surprised that he could nowhere see Mr. Lavender on board the smack. Perhaps he had lain down on the nets in the bottom of the boat.

When Donald got out to the smack, he found the young man lying insensible, his face white, and his teeth clenched. With something of a cry, the old fisherman jumped into the boat, knelt down, and pro-

ceeded in a rough and ready fashion to force some whisky into Lavender's mouth.

"Oh ay, oh yes, it is a grand thing, the whushkey," he muttered to himself; "oh yes, sir, you must hef some more—it is no matter if you will choke—it is ferry goot whushkey, and will do you no harm whatever—and, oh yes, sir, that is ferry well, and you are all right again, and you will sit quite quiet now, and you will hef a little more whushkey."

The young man looked round him.

"Have you been ashore, Donald? Oh, yes; I suppose so. Did I fall down? Well, I am all right now; it was the glare of the sea that made me giddy. Take a dram for yourself, Donald."

"There is but one glass, sir," said Donald, who had picked up something of the notions of gentlefolks, "but I will just tek the bottle;" and so, to avoid drinking out of the same glass (which was rather a small one), he was good enough to take a pull, and a strong pull, at the black bottle. Then he heaved a sigh, and wiped the top of the bottle with his sleeve.

"Yes, as I was saying, sir, there was none of the gentlemen I hef effer seen in Tarbert will keep at the pentin so long ass you; and many of them will be stronger ass you and will be more accustomed to it whatever. But when a man iss making money—" and Donald shook his head; he knew it was useless to argue.

"But I am not making money, Donald," Lavender said, still looking a trifle pale. "I doubt whether I have made as much as you have since I came to Tarbert."

"Oh yes," said Donald, contentedly, "all the gentlemen will say that. They never hef any money. But wass you ever with them when they could not get a dram because they had no money to pay for it?"

Donald's test of impecuniosity could not be gainsayed. Lavender laughed, and bade him get back into the other boat.

"Deed I will not," said Donald, sturdily.

Lavender stared at him.

"Oh no; you wass doing quite enough the day already, or you would not hef tumbled into the boat whatever. And supposing that you wass to hef tumbled into the water, you would have been trooned as sure as you wass alive."

"And a good job too, Donald," said the younger man, idly looking at the lapping green water.

Donald shook his head gravely.

"You would not say that if you had friends of yours that wass trooned, and if you had seen them when they went down in the water."

"They say it is an easy death, Donald."

"They neffer tried it that said that," said the old fisherman, gloomily. "It wass one day the son of my sister wass coming over from Saltcoats—but I hef no wish to speak of it; and that wass but one among ferry many that I have known."

"How long is it since you were in the Lewis, did you say?" Lavender asked, changing the subject. Donald was accustomed to have the talk suddenly diverted into this channel. He could not tell why the young English stranger wanted him continually to be talking about the Lewis.

"Oh, it is many and many a year ago, as I hef said; and you will know far more about the Lewis than I will. But Stornoway, that is a fine big town; and I hef a cousin there that keeps a shop, and is a ferry rich man whatever, and many's the time he will ask me to come and see him. And if the Lord be spared, maybe I will some day."

"You mean if you be spared, Donald."

"Oh aye; it is all wan," said Donald.

Lavender had brought with him some bread and cheese in a piece of paper, for luncheon; and this store of frugal provisions having been opened out, the old fisherman was invited to join in; an invitation he gravely, but not eagerly, accepted. He took off his blue bonnet and said grace; then he took the bread and cheese in his hand, and looked round inquiringly. There was a stone jar of water in the bottom of the boat; that was not what Donald was looking after. Lavender handed him the black bottle he had brought out from the cottage, which was more to his mind. And then, this humble meal despatched, the old man was persuaded to go back to his post, and Lavender continued his work.

The short afternoon was drawing to a close when young Johnny Eyre came sailing in from Loch Fyne, himself and a boy of ten or twelve managing that crank little boat with its top-heavy sails.

"Are you at work yet, Lavender?" he said. "I never saw such a beggar. It's getting quite dark."

"What sort of luncheon did Newstead give you, Johnny?"

"Oh, something worth going for, I can tell you. You want to live in Tarbert for a month or two to find out the value of decent cooking and good wine. He was awfully surprised when I described this place to him. He wouldn't believe you were living here in a cottage—I said a garret, for I pitched it hot and strong, mind you. I said you were living in a garret, that you never saw a razor, and lived on oatmeal porridge and whisky, and that your only amusement was going out at night and risking your neck in this

delightful boat of mine. You should have seen him examining this remarkable vessel. And there were two ladies on board, and they were asking after you, too."

"Who were they?"

"I don't know. I didn't catch their names when I was introduced; but the noble skipper called one of them Polly."

"Oh, I know."

"Ain't you coming ashore, Lavender? You can't see to work now."

"All right. I shall put my traps ashore; and then I'll have a run with you down Loch Fyne, if you like, Johnny."

"Well, I don't like," said the handsome lad, frankly; "for it's looking rather squally about. It seems to me you're bent on drowning yourself. Before those other fellows went, they came to the conclusion that you had committed a murder."

"Did they really?" Lavender said, with little interest.

"And if you go away and live in that wild place you were talking of during the winter, they will be quite sure of it. Why, man, you'd come back with your hair turned white. You might as well think of living by yourself at the Arctic Pole."

Neither Johnny Eyre nor any of the men who had just left Tarbert knew anything of Frank Lavender's recent history; and Lavender himself was not disposed to be communicative. They would know soon enough when they went up to London. In the meantime they were surprised to find that Lavender's habits were very singularly altered. He had grown miserly. They laughed when he told them he had no money; and he did not seek to persuade them of the fact; but it was clear, at all events, that none of them

lived so frugally, or worked so anxiously, as he. Then, when his work was done in the evening, and when they met alternately at each other's rooms, to dine off mutton and potatoes, with a glass of whisky, and a pipe, and a game of cards to follow, what was the meaning of those sudden fits of silence that would strike in when the general hilarity was at its pitch? And what was the meaning of the utter recklessness he displayed when they would go out of an evening in their open sailing-boats to shoot sea-fowl, or make a voyage along the rocky coast in the dead of night, to wait for the dawn to show them the haunts of the seals? The Lavender they had met occasionally in London was a fastidious, dilettante, self-possessed, and yet not disagreeable young fellow; this man was almost pathetically anxious about his work, oftentimes he was morose and silent, and then again there was no sort of danger or difficulty he was not ready to plunge into when they were sailing about that iron-bound coast. They could not make it out; but the joke among themselves was that he had committed a murder, and therefore had grown reckless.

This Johnny Eyre was not much of an artist; but he liked the society of artists; he had a little money of his own, plenty of time, and a love of boating and shooting; and so he had pitched his tent at Tarbert, and was proud to cherish the delusion that he was working hard and earning fame and wealth. As a matter of fact, he never earned anything; but he had very good spirits, and living in Tarbert is cheap.

From the moment that Lavender had come to the place, Johnny Eyre made him his special companion. He had a great respect for a man who could shoot anything anywhere; and when he and Lavender came

back together from a cruise, there was no use saying which had actually done the brilliant deeds the evidence of which was carried ashore. But Lavender, oddly enough, knew little about sailing; and Johnny was pleased to assume the airs of an instructor on this point; his only difficulty being that his pupil had more than the ordinary hardihood of an ignoramus, and was inclined to do reckless things even after he had sufficient skill to know that they were dangerous.

Lavender got into the small boat, taking his canvas with him, but leaving his easel in the fishing-smack. He pulled himself and Johnny Eyre ashore; they scrambled up the rocks and into the road; and then they went into the small white cottage in which Lavender lived. The picture was, for greater safety, left in Lavender's bedroom, which already contained about a dozen canvases with sketches in various stages on them. Then he went out to his friend again.

"I've had a long day to-day, Johnny. I wish you'd go out with me; the excitement of a squall would clear one's brain, I fancy."

"Oh, I'll go out if you like," Eyre said; "but I shall take very good care to run in before the squall comes, if there's any about. I don't think there will be, after all. I fancied I saw a flash of lightning about half an hour ago, down in the south; but nothing has come of it. There are some curlew about; and the guillemots are in thousands. You don't seem to care about shooting guillemots, Lavender."

"Well, you see, potting a bird that is sitting on the water——" said Lavender with a shrug.

"Oh, it isn't as easy as you might imagine. Of course, you could kill them if you liked, but everybody ain't such a swell as you are with a gun; and,

mind you, it's uncommonly awkward to catch the right moment for firing when the bird goes bobbing up and down on the waves, disappearing altogether every second. I think it's very good fun myself. It is very exciting when you don't know the moment the bird will dive, and whether you can afford to go any nearer. And as for shooting them on the water, you have to do that; for when do you get a chance of shooting them flying?"

"I don't see much necessity for shooting them at any time," said Lavender, as he went down to the shore again, "but I am glad to see you get some amusement out of it. Have you got cartridges with you? Is your gun in the boat?"

"Yes. Come along. We'll have a run out, anyhow."

When they pulled out again to that cockle-shell craft with its stone ballast and big brown mainsail, the boy was sent ashore, and the two companions set out by themselves. By this time the sun had gone down, and a strange green twilight was shining over the sea. As they got further out, the dusky shores seemed to have a pale mist hanging around them; but there were no clouds on the hills, for a clear sky shone overhead, awaiting the coming of the stars. Strange, indeed, was the silence out here, broken only by the lapping of the water on the sides of the boat, and the calling of birds in the distance. Far away the orange ray of a lighthouse began to quiver in the lambent dusk. The pale green light on the waves did not die out; but the shadows grew darker, so that Eyre, with his gun close at hand, could not make out his groups of guillemots, although he heard them calling all around. They had come out too late, indeed, for any such purpose.

Thither, on those beautiful evenings, after his day's work was over, Lavender was accustomed to come, either by himself or with his present companion. Johnny Eyre did not intrude on his solitude; he was invariably too eager to get a shot, his chief delight being to get to the bow, to let the boat drift for a while silently through the waves, so that she might come unawares on some flock of sea-birds. Lavender, sitting in the stern, with the tiller in his hand, was really alone in this world of water and sky, with all the majesty of the night and the stars around him.

And on these occasions he used to sit and dream of the beautiful time long ago in Loch Roag, when nights such as these used to come over the Atlantic, and find Sheila and himself sailing on the peaceful waters, or seated high up on the rocks listening to the murmur of the tide. Here was the same strange silence, the same solemn and pale light in the sky, the same mystery of the moving plain all around them that seemed somehow to be alive and yet voiceless and sad. Many a time his heart became so full of recollections, that he had almost called aloud "Sheila! Sheila!" and waited for the sea and the sky to answer him with the sound of her voice. In these bygone days he had pleased himself with the fancy that the girl was somehow the product of all the beautiful aspects of nature around her. It was the sea that was in her eyes; it was the fair sunlight that shone in her face; the breath of her life was the breath of the moorland winds. He had written verses about this fancy of hers; and he had conveyed them secretly to her, sure that she, at least, would find no defects in them. And many a time, far away from Loch Roag, and from Sheila, lines of this conceit would wander

through his brain, set to the saddest of all music, the music of irreparable loss. What did they say to him now that he recalled them like some half-forgotten voice out of the strange past?—

For she, and the clouds, and the breezes were one,
And the hills and the sea had conspired with the sun
To charm and bewilder all men with the grace
They combined and conferred on her wonderful face.

* * * * *

The sea lapped around the boat; the green light on the waves grew less intense; in the silence the first of the stars came out; and somehow the time in which he had seen Sheila in these rare and magical colours seemed to become more and more remote.

* * * * *

An angel in passing looked downward and smiled,
And carried to heaven the fame of the child;
And then what the waves and the sky and the sun
And the tremulous breath of the hills had begun,
Required but one touch. To finish the whole,
God loved her, and gave her a beautiful soul!

And what had he done with this rare treasure entrusted to him? His companions, jesting among themselves, had said that he had committed a murder; in his own heart there was something at this moment of a murderer's remorse.

Johnny Eyre uttered a short cry. Lavender looked ahead, and saw that some black object was disappearing among the waves.

"What a fright I got!" Eyre said, with a laugh. "I never saw the fellow come near; and he came up just below the bowsprit. He came heeling over as quiet as a mouse. I say, Lavender, I think we might as well cut it now; my eyes are quite bewildered with the light on the water; I couldn't make out a kraken if it was coming across our bows."

"Don't be in a hurry, Johnny. We'll put her out

a bit, and then let her drift back. I want to tell you a story."

"Oh, all right," he said; and so they put her head round, and soon she was lying over before the breeze, and slowly drawing away from those outlines of the coast which showed them where Tarbert harbour cut into the land. And then, once more, they let her drift, and young Eyre took a nip of whisky and settled himself so as to hear Lavender's story, whatever it might be.

"You knew I was married?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you ever wonder why my wife did not come here?"

"Why should I wonder? Plenty of fellows have to spend half the year apart from their wives; the only thing in your case I couldn't understand was the necessity for your doing it. For you know that's all nonsense about your want of funds."

"It isn't nonsense, Johnny. But now, if you like, I will tell you why my wife has never come here."

Then he told the story, out there under the stars, with no thought of interruption, for there was a world of moving water around them. It was the first time he had let anyone into his confidence; and perhaps the darkness aided his revelations; but at any rate he went over all the old time until it seemed to his companion that he was talking to himself, so aimless and desultory were his pathetic reminiscences. He called her Sheila, though Eyre had never heard her name. He spoke of her father as though Eyre must have known him. And yet this rambling series of confession, and self-reproaches, and tender memories, did form a certain sort of narrative, so that the young fellow

sitting quietly in the boat there got a pretty fair notion of what had happened.

"You are an unlucky fellow," he said to Lavender. "I never heard anything like that. But you know you must have exaggerated a good deal about it—I should like to hear her story. I am sure you could not have treated her like that."

"God knows how I did, but the truth is just as I have told you; and although I was blind enough at the time, I can read the whole story now in letters of fire. I hope you will never have such a thing constantly before your eyes, Johnny."

The lad was silent for some time; and then he said rather timidly—

"Do you think, Lavender, she knows how sorry you are?"

"If she did, what good would that do?" said the other.

"Women are awfully forgiving, you know," Johnny said, in a hesitating fashion. "I—I don't think it is quite fair not to give her a chance—a chance of—of being generous, you know. You know, I think the better a woman is, the more inclined she is to be charitable to other folks who mayn't be quite up to the mark, you know; and you see, it ain't everyone who can claim to be always doing the right thing; and the next best thing to that is to be sorry for what you've done and try to do better. It's rather cheeky, you know, my advising you—or trying to make you pluck up your spirits—but I'll tell you what it is, Lavender, if I knew her well enough I'd go straight to her to-morrow, and I'd put in a good word for you, and tell her some things she doesn't know, and you'd see if she wouldn't write you a letter, or even come and see you——"

"That is all nonsense, Johnny, though it's very good of you to think of it. The mischief I have done isn't to be put aside by the mere writing of a letter——"

"But it seems to me," Johnny said, with some warmth, "that you are as unfair to her as to yourself in not giving her a chance. You don't know how willing she may be to overlook everything that is past——"

"If she were, I am not fit to go near her. I couldn't have the cheek to try, Johnny."

"But what more can you be than sorry for what is past?" said the younger fellow, persistently. "And you don't know how pleased it makes a good woman to give her a chance of forgiving anybody. And if we were all to set up for being archangels, and if there was to be no sort of getting back for us after we had made a slip, where should we be? And in place of going to her, and making it all right, you start away for the Sound of Islay, and, by Jove, won't you find out what spending a winter under these Jura mountains means!"

A flash of lightning—somewhere down among the Arran hills—interrupted the speaker, and drew the attention of the two young men to the fact that in the east and south-east the stars were no longer visible, while something of a brisk breeze had sprung up.

"This breeze will take us back splendidly," Johnny said, getting ready again for the run in to Tarbert.

He had scarcely spoken when Lavender called attention to a fishing-smack that was apparently making for the harbour. With all sails set, she was sweeping by them like some black phantom across the dark plain of the sea. They could not make out the figures on board of her; but as she passed, some one called out to them.

"What did he say?" Lavender asked.

"I don't know," his companion said, "but it was some sort of warning, I suppose. By Jove, Lavender, what is that?"

Behind them there was a strange hissing and rumbling noise that the wind brought along to them, but nothing could be seen.

"Rain, isn't it?" Lavender said.

"There never was rain like that," his companion said. "That is a squall, and it will be here presently. We must haul down the sails—for God's sake, look sharp, Lavender!"

There was certainly no time to lose, for the noise behind them was increasing and deepening into a roar; and the heavens had grown black overhead, so that the spars and ropes of the crank little boat could scarcely be made out. They had just got the sails down when the first gust of the squall struck the boat as with a blow of iron, and sent her staggering forward into the trough of the sea. Then all around them came the fury of the storm; and the cause of the sound they had heard was apparent in the foaming water that was torn and scattered abroad by the gale. Up from the black south-east came the fierce hurricane, sweeping everything before it, and hurling this creaking and straining boat about as if it were a cork. They could see little of the sea around them, but they could hear the awful noise of it, and they knew they were being swept along on those hurrying waves, towards a coast which was invisible in the blackness of the night.

"Johnny, we'll never make the harbour. I can't see a light," Lavender cried. "Hadn't we better try to keep her up the loch?"

"We *must* make the harbour," his companion said; "she can't stand this much longer."

Blinding torrents of rain were now being driven down by the force of the wind, so that all around them nothing was visible but a wild boiling and seething of clouds and waves. Eyre was up at the bow, trying to catch some glimpse of the outlines of the coast, or to make out some light that would show them where the entrance to Tarbert harbour lay. If only some lurid shaft of lightning would pierce the gloom!—for they knew that they were being driven headlong on an iron-bound coast, and amid all the noise of the wind and the sea they listened with a fear that had no words for the first roar of the waves along the rocks.

Suddenly Lavender heard a shrill scream—almost like the cry that a hare gives when it finds the dog's fangs in its neck; and at the same moment, amid all the darkness of the night, a still blacker object seemed to start out of the gloom, right ahead of them. The boy had no time to shout any warning beyond that cry of despair; for with a wild crash the boat struck on the rocks, rose and struck again, and was then dashed over by a heavy sea, both of its occupants being thrown into the fierce swirls of foam that were dashing in and through the rocky channels. Strangely enough they were thrown together; and Lavender, clinging to the seaweed, instinctively laid hold of his companion just as the latter appeared to be slipping into the gulf beneath.

"Johnny," he cried, "hold on! hold on to me, or we shall both go in a minute."

But the lad had no life left in him, and lay like a log there, while each wave that struck and rolled

hissing and gurgling through the channels between the rocks, seemed to drag at him and seek to suck him down into the darkness. With one despairing effort Lavender struggled to get him further up on the slippery seaweed, and succeeded. But his success had lost him his own vantage-ground; and he knew that he was going down into the swirling waters beneath, close by the broken boat that was still being dashed about by the waves.

CHAPTER X.

"Hame fain would I be."

UNEXPECTED circumstances had detained Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter in London long after everybody else had left; but at length they were ready to start for their projected trip into Switzerland. On the day before their departure Ingram dined with them —on his own invitation. He had got into a habit of letting them know when it would suit him to devote an evening to their instruction; and it was difficult, indeed, to say which of the two ladies submitted the more readily and meekly to the dictatorial enunciation of his opinions. Mrs. Kavanagh, it is true, sometimes dissented in so far as a smile indicated dissent; but her daughter scarcely reserved to herself so much liberty. Mr. Ingram had taken her in hand; and expected of her the obedience and respect due to his superior age.

And yet, somehow or other, he occasionally found himself indirectly soliciting the advice of this gentle, clear-eyed, and clear-headed young person, more especially as regarded the difficulties surrounding Sheila; and sometimes a chance remark of hers, uttered in a timid, or careless, or even mocking fashion, would

astonish him by the rapid light it threw on these dark troubles. On this evening—the last evening they were spending in London—it was his own affairs which he proposed to mention to Mrs. Lorraine; and he had no more hesitation in doing so than if she had been his oldest friend. He wanted to ask her what he should do about the money that Mrs. Lavender had left him; and he intended to be a good deal more frank with Mrs. Lorraine than with any of the others to whom he had spoken about the matter. For he was well aware that Mrs. Lavender had at first resolved that he should have at least a considerable portion of her wealth; or why should she have asked him how he would like to be a rich man?

"I do not think," said Mrs. Lorraine, quietly, "that there is much use in your asking me what you should do; for I know what you will do, whether it accords with anyone's opinion or no. And yet you would find a great advantage in having money."

"Oh, I know that," he said readily. "I should like to be rich beyond anything that ever happened in a drama; and I should take my chance of all the evil influences that money is supposed to exert. Do you know, I think you rich people are very unfairly treated—"

"But we are not rich," said Mrs. Kavanagh, passing at the time. "Cecilia and I find ourselves very poor sometimes."

"But I quite agree with Mr. Ingram, Mamma," said Cecilia, as if anyone had the courage to disagree with Mr. Ingram; "rich people are shamefully ill-treated. If you go to a theatre, now, you find that all the virtues are on the side of the poor; and if there are a few vices, you get a thousand excuses for them. No

one takes account of the temptations of the rich. You have people educated from their infancy to imagine that the whole world was made for them—every wish they have, gratified—every day showing them people dependent on them and grateful for favours; and no allowance is made for such a temptation to become haughty, self-willed, and overbearing. But of course it stands to reason that the rich never have justice done them in plays and stories; for the people who write are poor."

"Not all of them."

"But enough to strike an average of injustice. And it is very hard. For it is the rich who buy books and who take boxes at the theatres, and then they find themselves grossly abused; whereas the humble peasant who can scarcely read at all, and who never pays more than sixpence for a seat in the gallery, is flattered, and coaxed, and caressed until one wonders whether the source of virtue is the drinking of sour ale. Mr. Ingram, you do it yourself. You impress Mamma and me with the belief that we are miserable sinners if we are not continually doing some act of charity. Well, that is all very pleasant and necessary, in moderation; but you don't find the poor folks so very anxious to live for other people. They don't care much what becomes of us. They take your port wine and flannels as if they were conferring a favour on you; but as for *your* condition and prospects, in this world and the next, they don't trouble much about that. Now, Mamma, just wait a moment——"

"I will not. You are a bad girl," said Mrs. Kavanagh, severely. "Here has Mr. Ingram been teaching you and making you better for ever so long back, and you pretend to accept his counsel and reform

yourself; and then all at once you break out, and throw down the tablets of the law, and conduct yourself like a heathen."

"Because I want him to explain, Mamma. I suppose he considers it wicked of us to start for Switzerland to-morrow. The money we shall spend in travelling might have despatched a cargo of muskets to some missionary station, so that——"

"Cecilia!"

"Oh no," Ingram said, carelessly, and nursing his knee with both his hands as usual, "travelling is not wicked—it is only unreasonable. A traveller, you know, is a person who has a house in one town, and who goes to live in a house in another town, in order to have the pleasure of paying for both."

"Mr. Ingram," said Mrs. Kavanagh, "will you talk seriously for one minute, and tell me whether we are to expect to see you in the Tyrol?"

But Ingram was not in a mood for talking seriously; and he waited to hear Mrs. Lorraine strike in with some calmly audacious invitation. She did not, however; and he turned round from her mother to question her. He was surprised to find that her eyes were fixed on the ground, and that something like a tinge of colour was in her face. He turned rapidly away again.

"Well, Mrs. Kavanagh," he said, with a fine air of indifference, "the last time we spoke about that, I was not in the difficulty I am in at present. How could I go travelling just now, without knowing how to regulate my daily expenses? Am I to travel with six white horses and silver bells, or trudge on foot with a wallet?"

"But you know quite well," said Mrs. Lorraine, warmly—"you know you will not touch that money that Mrs. Lavender has left you."

"Oh, pardon me," he said; "I should rejoice to have it if it did not properly belong to someone else. And the difficulty is that Mr. Mackenzie is obviously very anxious that neither Mr. Lavender nor Sheila should have it. If Sheila gets it, of course she will give it to her husband. Now, if it is not to be given to her, do you think I should regard the money with any particular horror, and refuse to touch it? That would be very romantic, perhaps; but I should be sorry, you know, to give my friends the most disquieting doubts about my sanity. Romance goes out of a man's head when the hair gets grey."

"Until a man has grey hair," Mrs. Lorraine said, still with some unnecessary fervour, "he does not know that there are things much more valuable than money. You wouldn't touch that money just now; and all the thinking and reasoning in the world will never get you to touch it."

"What am I to do with it?" he said, meekly.

"Give it to Mr. Mackenzie, in trust for his daughter," Mrs. Lorraine said promptly; and then, seeing that her mother had gone to the end of the drawing-room, to fetch something or other, she added quickly: "I should be more sorry than I can tell you to find you accepting this money. You do not wish to have it. You do not need it. And if you did take it, it would prove a source of continual embarrassment and regret to you; and no assurances on the part of Mr. Mackenzie would be able to convince you that you had acted rightly by his daughter. Now, if you simply hand over your responsibilities to him, he cannot refuse them, for the sake of his own child, and you are left with the sense of having acted nobly and generously. I hope there are many men who would do what I ask you to

do; but I have not met many to whom I could make such an appeal with any hope. But, after all, that is only advice. I have no right to ask you to do anything like that. You asked me for my opinion about it——Well, that is it. But I should not have asked you to act on it."

"But I will," he said, in a low voice; and then he went to the other end of the room, for Mrs. Kavanagh was calling him to help her in finding something she had lost.

Before he left that evening Mrs. Lorraine said to him—

"We go by the night mail to Paris to-morrow night; and we shall dine here at five. Would you have the courage to come up and join us in that melancholy ceremony?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "if I may go down to the station to see you away afterwards."

"I think if we got you so far, we should persuade you to go with us," Mrs. Kavanagh said, with a smile.

He sat silent for a minute. Of course, she could not seriously mean such a thing. But at all events she would not be displeased if he crossed their path while they were actually abroad.

"It is getting too late in the year to go to Scotland now," he said, with some hesitation.

"Oh, most certainly," Mrs. Lorraine said.

"I don't know where the man in whose yacht I was to have gone may be now. I might spend half my holiday in trying to catch him."

"And during that time you would be alone," Mrs. Lorraine said.

"I suppose the Tyrol is a very nice place," he suggested.

"Oh, most delightful," she exclaimed. "You know,

we should go round by Switzerland, and go up by Lucerne and Zurich to the end of the Lake of Constance——Bregenz, Mamma, isn't that the place where we hired that good-natured man the year before last?"

"Yes, child."

"Now, you see, Mr. Ingram, if you had less time than we—if you could not start with us to-morrow—you might come straight down by Schaffhausen and the steamer, and catch us up there, and then Mamma would become your guide. I am sure we should have some pleasant days together, till you got tired of us, and then you could go off on a walking tour if you pleased. And then, you know, there would be no difficulty about our meeting at Bregenz; for Mamma and I have plenty of time, and we should wait there for a few days so as to make sure——"

"Cecilia," said Mrs. Kavanagh, "you must not persuade Mr. Ingram against his will. He may have other duties—other friends to see perhaps."

"Who proposed it, mamma?" said the daughter, calmly.

"I did, as a mere joke. But, of course, if Mr. Ingram thinks of going to the Tyrol, we should be most pleased to see him there."

"Oh, I have no other friends whom I am bound to see," Ingram said, with some hesitation; "and I should like to go to the Tyrol. But—the fact is—I am afraid——"

"May I interrupt you?" said Mrs. Lorraine. "You do not like to leave London so long as your friend Sheila is in trouble. Is not that the case? And yet she has her father to look after her. And it is clear you cannot do much for her when you do not even know where Mr. Lavender is. On the whole, I think

you should consider yourself a little bit now, and not get cheated out of your holidays for the year."

"Very well," Ingram said, "I shall be able to tell you to-morrow."

To be so phlegmatic and matter-of-fact a person, Mr. Ingram was sorely disturbed on going home that evening, nor did he sleep much during the night. For the more that he speculated on all the possibilities that might arise from his meeting those people in the Tyrol, the more pertinaciously did this refrain follow these excursive fancies—"*If I go to the Tyrol, I shall fall in love with that girl and ask her to marry me. And if I do so, what position should I hold with regard to her, as a penniless man with a rich wife?*"

He did not look at the question in such a light as the opinion of the world might throw on it. The difficulty was what she herself might afterwards come to think of their mutual relations. True it was that no one could be more gentle and submissive to him than she appeared to be. In matters of opinion and discussion he already ruled with an autocratic authority which he fully perceived himself, and exercised, too, with some sort of notion that it was good for this clear-headed young woman to have to submit to control. But of what avail would this moral authority be as against the consciousness she would have that it was her fortune that was supplying both with the means of living?

He went down to his office in the morning with no plans formed. The forenoon passed; and he had decided on nothing. At mid-day he suddenly bethought him that it would be very pleasant if Sheila would go and see Mrs. Lorraine; and forthwith he did that which would have driven Frank Lavender out of his senses—

he telegraphed to Mrs. Lorraine for permission to bring Sheila and her father to dinner at five. He certainly knew that such a request was a trifle cool; but he had discovered that Mrs. Lorraine was not easily shocked by such audacious experiments on her good-nature. When he received the telegram in reply, he knew it granted what he asked. The words were merely "Certainly—by all means—but not later than five."

Then he hastened down to the house in which Sheila lived, and found that she and her father had just returned from visiting some exhibition. Mr. Mackenzie was not in the room.

"Sheila," Ingram said, "what would you think of my getting married?"

Sheila looked up with a bright smile and said—

"It would please me very much—it would be a great pleasure to me; and I have expected it for some time."

"You have expected it?" he repeated, with a stare.

"Yes," she said, quietly.

"Then you fancy you know——" he said, or rather stammered, in great embarrassment, when she interrupted him by saying—

"Oh, yes, I think I know. When you came down every evening to tell me all the praises of Mrs. Lorraine, and how clever she was, and kind, I expected you would come some day with another message; and now I am very glad to hear it; you have changed all my opinions about her, and——"

Then she rose and took both his hands, and looked frankly into his face.

"—And I do hope most sincerely you will be happy, my dear friend."

Ingram was fairly taken aback at the consequences

of his own imprudence. He had never dreamed for a moment that anyone would have suspected such a thing; and he had thrown out the suggestion to Sheila almost as a jest, believing, of course, that it compromised no one. And here—before he had spoken a word to Mrs. Lorraine on the subject—he was being congratulated on his approaching marriage.

"Oh, Sheila," he said, "this is all a mistake. It was a joke of mine—if I had known you would think of Mrs. Lorraine, I should not have said a word about it——"

"But it is Mrs. Lorraine?" Sheila said.

"Well, but I have never mentioned such a thing to her—never hinted it in the remotest manner. I dare say if I had, she might laugh the matter aside as too absurd."

"She will not do that," Sheila said; "if you ask her to marry you, she will marry you. I am sure of that from what I have heard, and she would be very foolish if she was not proud and glad to do that. And you—what doubt can you have, after all that you have been saying of late?"

"But you don't marry a woman merely because you admire her cleverness and kindness," he said; and then he added suddenly, "Sheila, would you do me a great favour? Mrs. Lorraine and her mother are leaving for the continent to-night. They dine at five; and I am commissioned to ask you and your papa if you would go up with me and have some dinner with them, you know, before they start. Won't you do that, Sheila?"

The girl shook her head, without answering. She had not gone to any friend's house since her husband had left London; and that house above all others was calculated to awaken in her bitter recollections.

"Won't you, Sheila?" he said. "You used to go there. I know they like you very much. I have seen you very well pleased and comfortable there, and I thought you were enjoying yourself."

"Yes, that is true," she said; and then she looked up, with a strange sort of smile on her lips, "but *'what made the assembly shine?'*"

That forced smile did not last long: the girl suddenly burst into tears, and rose, and went away to the window. Mackenzie came into the room; he did not see his daughter was crying.

"Well, Mr. Ingram, and are you coming with us to Lewis? We cannot always be staying in London, for there will be many things wanting the looking after in Borva, as you will know ferry well. And yet Sheila she will not go back; and Mairi, too, she will be forgetting the ferry sight of her own people; but if you wass coming with us, Mr. Ingram, Sheila she would come too, and it would be ferry good for her whatever."

"I have brought you another proposal. Will you take Sheila to see the Tyrol, and I will go with you?"

"The Tyrol?" said Mr. Mackenzie. "Ay, it is a ferry long way away, but if Sheila will care to go to the Tyrol—oh, yes! I will go to the Tyrol, or anywhere if she will go out of London, for it is not good for a young girl to be always in the one house, and no company, and no variety; and I wass saying to Sheila what good will she do sitting by the window, and thinking over things, and crying sometimes—by Kott, it is a foolish thing for a young girl, and I will hef no more of it!"

In other circumstances Ingram would have laughed

at this dreadful threat. Despite the frown on the old man's face, the sudden stamp of his foot, and the vehemence of his words, Ingram knew that if Sheila had turned round and said that she wished to be shut up in a dark room for the rest of her life, the old King of Borva would have said, "Ferry well, Sheila," in the meekest way, and would have been satisfied if only he could share her imprisonment with her.

"But first of all, Mr. Mackenzie, I have another proposal to make to you," Ingram said; and then he urged upon Sheila's father to accept Mrs. Lorraine's invitation. Mr. Mackenzie was nothing loth; Sheila was living by far too monotonous a life. He went over to the window to her and said—

"Sheila, my lass, you wass going nowhere else this evening; and it would be ferry convenient to go with Mr. Ingram, and he would see his friends away, and we could go to a theatre then. And it is no new thing for you to go to fine houses, and see other people; but it is new to me, and you wass saying what a beautiful house it wass many a time, and I hef wished to see it. And the people they are ferry kind, Sheila, to send me an invitation, and if they wass to come to the Lewis, what would you think if you asked them to come to your house, and they paid no heed to it? Now, it is after four, Sheila, and if you wass to get ready now——"

"Yes, I will go and get ready, papa," she said.

Ingram had a vague consciousness that he was taking Sheila up to introduce to her Mrs. Lorraine in a new character. Would Sheila look at the woman she used to fear and dislike in a wholly different fashion, and be prepared to adorn her with all the

graces which he had so often described to her? Ingram hoped that Sheila would get to like Mrs. Lorraine; and that by-and-by a better acquaintance between them might lead to a warm and friendly intimacy. Somehow he felt that if Sheila would betray such a liking—if she would come to him and say honestly that she was rejoiced he meant to marry—all his doubts would be cleared away. Sheila had already said pretty nearly as much as that; but then it followed what she understood to be an announcement of his approaching marriage, and, of course, the girl's kindly nature at once suggested a few pretty speeches. Sheila now knew that nothing was settled; after looking at Mrs. Lorraine in the light of these new possibilities, would she come to him and council him to go on and challenge a decision?

Mr. Mackenzie received with a grave dignity and politeness the more than friendly welcome given him both by Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter; and, in view of their approaching tour, he gave them to understand that he had himself established somewhat familiar relations with foreign countries by reason of his meeting with the ships and sailors hailing from these distant shores. He displayed a profound knowledge of the habits and customs, and of the natural products, of many remote lands, which were much further afield than a little bit of inland Germany. He represented the island of Borva, indeed, as a sort of lighthouse from which you could survey pretty nearly all the countries of the globe; and broadly hinted that, so far from insular prejudice being the fruit of living in such a place, a general intercourse with diverse peoples tended to widen the understanding and throw light on the various social experiments that had been

made by the lawgivers, the philanthropists, the philosophers of the world.

It seemed to Sheila, as she sat and listened, that the pale, calm, and clear-eyed young lady opposite her was not quite so self-possessed as usual. She seemed shy, and a little self-conscious. Did she suspect that she was being observed, Sheila wondered; and the reason? When dinner was announced she took Sheila's arm, and allowed Mr. Ingram to follow them, protesting, into the other room; but there was much more of embarrassment and timidity than of an audacious mischief in her look. She was very kind indeed to Sheila; but she had wholly abandoned that air of maternal patronage which she used to assume towards the girl. She seemed to wish to be more friendly and confidential with her; and, indeed, scarcely spoke a word to Ingram during dinner, so persistently did she talk to Sheila, who sat next her.

Ingram got vexed.

"Mrs. Lorraine," he said, "you seem to forget that this is a solemn occasion. You ask us to a farewell banquet; but instead of observing the proper ceremonies, you pass the time in talking about fancy-work, and music, and other ordinary every-day trifles."

"What are the ceremonies?" she said.

"Well," he answered, "you need not occupy the time with crochet——"

"Mrs. Lavender and I are very well pleased to talk about trifles."

"But I am not," he said, bluntly, "and I am not going to be shut out by a conspiracy. Come, let us talk about your journey."

"Will my lord give his commands as to the point at which we shall start the conversation."

"You may skip the Channel."

"I wish I could," she remarked with a sigh.

"We shall land you in Paris. How are we to know that you have arrived safely?"

She looked embarrassed for a moment, and then said—

"If it is of any consequence for you to know, I shall be writing in any case to Mrs. Lavender, about some little private matter."

Ingram did not receive this promise with any great show of delight.

"You see," he said, somewhat glumly, "if I am to meet you anywhere, I should like to know the various stages of your route, so that I could guard against our missing each other."

"You have decided to go then?"

Ingram, not looking at her, but looking at Sheila, said "Yes!" and Sheila, despite all her efforts, could not help glancing up with a brief smile and blush of pleasure that were quite visible to everybody. Mrs. Lorraine struck in, with a sort of nervous haste,—

"Oh, that will be very pleasant for mamma; for she gets rather tired of me at times when we are travelling. Two women who always read the same sort of books, and have the same opinions about the people they meet, and have precisely the same tastes in everything, are not very amusing companions for each other. You want a little discussion thrown in——"

"And if we meet Mr. Ingram we are sure to have that," Mrs. Kavanagh said, benignly.

"And you want somebody to give you new opinions, and put things differently, you know. I am sure mamma will be most kind to you, if you can make it convenient to spend a few days with us, Mr. Ingram."

"And I have been trying to persuade Mr. Mackenzie and this young lady to come also," said Ingram.

"Oh, that would be delightful!" Mrs. Lorraine cried, suddenly taking Sheila's hand. "You will come, won't you? We should have such a pleasant party. I am sure your papa would be most interested; and we are not tied to any route—we should go wherever you pleased."

She would have gone on beseeching and advising, but she saw something in Sheila's face which told her that all her efforts would be unavailing.

"It is very kind of you," Sheila said, "but I do not think I can go to the Tyrol."

"Then you will go back to the Lewis, Sheila," her father said.

"I cannot go back to the Lewis, papa," she said, simply; and at this point Ingram, perceiving how painful the discussion was for the girl, suddenly called attention to the hour, and asked Mrs. Kavanagh if all her portmanteaus were strapped up.

They drove in a body down to the station; and Mr. Ingram was most assiduous in supplying the two travellers with an abundance of everything they could not possibly want. He got them a reading-lamp, though both of them declared they never read in a train. He got them some eau-de-cologne, though they had plenty in their travelling-case. He purchased for them an amount of miscellaneous literature that would have been of benefit to a hospital—provided that the patients were strong enough to bear it. And then bade them good-bye at least half-a-dozen times as the train was slowly moving out of the station, and made the most solemn vows about meeting them at Bregenz.

"Now, Sheila," he said, "shall we go to a theatre?"

"I do not care to go unless you wish," was the answer.

"She does not care to go anywhere now," her father said; and then the girl, seeing that he was rather distressed about her apparent want of interest, pulled herself together and said, cheerfully—

"Is it not too late to go to a theatre? And I am sure we could be very comfortable at home. Mairi, she will think it very unkind if we go to the theatre by ourselves."

"Mairi!" said her father, impatiently, for he never lost an opportunity of indirectly justifying Lavender. "Mairi has more sense than you, Sheila, and she knows that a servant-lass has to stay at home, and she knows that she is ferry different from you, and she is a ferry good girl whatever, and hass no pride, and she does not expect nonsense in going about and such things."

"I am quite sure, papa, you would rather go home and sit down and have a talk with Mr. Ingram, and a pipe, and a little whisky, than go to any theatre."

"What I would do! And what I would like!" said her father, in a vexed way. "Sheila you have no more sense as a lass that wass still at the school. I want you to go to the theatre, and amuse yourself, instead of sitting in the house, and thinking, thinking, thinking. And all for what?"

"But if one has something to be sorry for, is it not better to think of it?"

"And what hef *you* to be sorry for?" said her father, in amazement, and forgetting that, in his diplomatic fashion, he had been accustoming Sheila to the notion that she, too, might have erred grievously and been in part responsible for all that had occurred.

"I have a great deal to be sorry for, papa," she

said; and then she renewed her entreaties that her two companions should abandon their notion of going to a theatre, and resolved to spend the rest of the evening in what she consented to call her home.

After all they formed a comfortable little company when they sat round the fire, which had been lit for cheerfulness rather than for warmth; and Ingram, at least, was in a particularly pleasant mood. For Sheila had seized the opportunity, when her father had gone out of the room for a few minutes, to say, suddenly—

"Oh, my dear friend, if you care for her, you have a great happiness before you."

"Why, Sheila?" he said, staring.

"She cares for you more than you can think—I saw it to-night in everything she said and did."

"I thought she was just a trifle saucy, do you know. She shunted me out of the conversation altogether."

Sheila shook her head and smiled.

"She was embarrassed. She suspects that you like her, and that I know it, and that I came to see her. If you ask her to marry you, she will do it gladly."

"Sheila," Ingram said, with a severity that was not in his heart, "you must not say such things. You might make fearful mischief by putting these wild notions into people's heads."

"They are not wild notions," she said, quietly. "A woman can tell what another woman is thinking about better than a man."

"And am I to go to the Tyrol and ask her to marry me?" he said, with the air of a meek scholar.

"I should like to see you married—very, very much indeed," Sheila said.

"And to her?"

"Yes, to her," the girl said, frankly. "For I am

sure she has a great regard for you, and she is clever enough to put value on—on—but I cannot flatter you, Mr. Ingram."

"Shall I send you word about what happens in the Tyrol?" he said, still with the humble air of one receiving instructions.

"Yes."

"And if she rejects me, what shall I do?"

"She will not reject you."

"Shall I come to you for consolation, and ask you what you meant by driving me on such a blunder?"

"If she rejects you," Sheila said, with a smile, "it will be your own fault, and you will deserve it. For you are a little too harsh with her, and you have too much authority, and I am surprised that she will be so amiable under it. Because, you know, a woman expects to be treated with much gentleness and deference before she has said she will marry—she likes to be entreated, and coaxed, and made much of; but instead of that, you are very overbearing with Mrs. Lorraine."

"I did not mean to be, Sheila," he said, honestly enough. "If anything of the kind happened, it must have been in a joke."

"Oh no, not a joke," Sheila said; "and I have noticed it before—the very first evening you came to their house. And perhaps you did not know of it yourself; and then Mrs. Lorraine, she is clever enough to see that you did not mean to be disrespectful. But she will expect you to alter that a great deal if you ask her to marry you—that is, until you are married."

"Have I ever been overbearing to you, Sheila?" he asked.

"To me? Oh, no. You have always been very gentle to me; but I know how that is. When you first

knew me, I was almost a child, and you treated me like a child; and ever since then it has always been the same. But to others—yes, you are too unceremonious; and Mrs. Lorraine will expect you to be much more mild and amiable, and you must let her have opinions of her own——"

"Sheila, you give me to understand that I am a bear," he said, in tones of injured protest.

Sheila laughed.

"Have I told you the truth at last? It was no matter as long as you had ordinary acquaintances to deal with. But now, if you wish to marry that pretty lady, you must be much more gentle if you are discussing anything with her; and if she says anything that is not very wise, you must not say bluntly that it is foolish, but you must smooth it away, and put her right gently, and then she will be grateful to you. But if you say to her, 'Oh, that is nonsense,' as you might say to a man, you will hurt her very much. The man would not care; he would think you were stupid to have a different opinion from him; but a woman fears she is not as clever as the man she is talking to, and likes his good opinion; and if he says something careless like that, she is sensitive to it, and it wounds her. To-night you contradicted Mrs. Lorraine about the *h* in those Italian words; and I am quite sure you were wrong. She knows Italian much better than you do; and yet she yielded to you very prettily."

"Go on, Sheila; go on," he said, with a resigned air. "What else did I do?"

"Oh, a great many rude things. You should not have contradicted Mrs. Kavanagh about the colour of an amethyst!"

"But why? You know she was wrong; and she

said herself a minute afterwards that she was thinking of a sapphire."

"But you ought not to contradict a person older than yourself," said Sheila, sententiously.

"Goodness gracious me! Because one person is born in one year, and one in another, is that any reason why you should say that an amethyst is blue? Mr. Mackenzie, come and talk to this girl. She is trying to pervert my principles. She says that in talking to a woman you have to abandon all hope of being accurate, and that respect for the truth is not to be thought of. Because a woman has a pretty face she is to be allowed to say that black is white, and white pea-green. And if you say anything to the contrary, you are a brute, and had better go and bellow by yourself in a wilderness."

"Sheila is quite right," said old Mackenzie, at a venture.

"Oh, do you think so?" Ingram asked, coolly. "Then I can understand how her moral sentiment has been destroyed; and it is easy to see where she has got a set of opinions that strike at the very roots of a respectable and decent society."

"Do you know," said Sheila, seriously, "that it is very rude of you to say so, even in jest? If you treat Mrs. Lorraine in this way——"

She suddenly stopped. Her father had not heard, being busy among his pipes. So the subject was discreetly dropped, Ingram reluctantly promising to pay some attention to Sheila's precepts of politeness.

Altogether, it was a pleasant evening they had; but when Ingram had left, Mr. Mackenzie said to his daughter—

"Now, look at this, Sheila. When Mr. Ingram goes

away from London, you hef no friend at all then in the place, and you are quite alone. Why will you not come to the Lewis, Sheila? It is no one there will know anything of what has happened here; and Mairi she is a good girl, and she will hold her tongue."

"They will ask me why I come back without my husband," Sheila said, looking down.

"Oh, you will leave that all to me," said her father, who knew he had surely sufficient skill to thwart the curiosity of a few simple creatures in Borva. "There is many a girl hass to go home for a time, while her husband he is away on his business; and there will no one hef the right to ask you any more than I will tell them, and I will tell them what they should know—oh, yes, I will tell them ferry well, and you will hef no trouble about it. And Sheila, you are a good lass, and you know that I hef many things to attend to that is not easy to write about——"

"I do know that, Papa," the girl said, "and many a time have I wished you would go back to the Lewis."

"And leave you here by yourself? Why, you are talking foolishly, Sheila. But now, Sheila, you will see how you could go back with me, and it would be a ferry different thing for you running about in the fresh air than shut up in a room in the middle of a town. And you are not looking ferry well, my lass, and Scarlett she will hef to take the charge of you."

"I will go to the Lewis with you, Papa, when you please," she said; and he was glad and proud to hear her decision; but there was no happy light of anticipation in her eyes, such as ought to have been awakened by this projected journey to the far island which she had known as her home.

And so it was, that one rough and blustering after-

noon the *Clansman* steamed into Stornoway harbour; and Sheila, casting timid and furtive glances towards the quay, saw Duncan standing there, with the waggonette some little distance back, under charge of a boy. Duncan was a proud man that day. He was the first to shove the gangway on to the vessel, and he was the first to get on board; and in another minute Sheila found the tall, keen-eyed, brown-faced keeper before her, and he was talking in a rapid and eager fashion, throwing in an occasional scrap of Gaelic in the mere hurry of his words.

"Oh yes, Miss Sheila, Scarlett she is ferry well whatever, but there is nothing will make her so well as your coming back to sa Lewis, and we wass saying yesterday that it looked as if it wass more as three or four years, or six years, since you went away from sa Lewis, but now it iss no time at all, for you are just the same Miss Sheila as we knew before; and there is not one in all Borva but will think it iss a good day this day that you will come back——"

"Duncan!" said Mackenzie, with an impatient stamp of his foot, "why will you talk like a foolish man? Get the luggage to the shore, instead of keeping us all the day in the boat."

"Oh, ferry well, Mr. Mackenzie," said Duncan, departing with an injured air, and grumbling as he went; "it iss no new thing to you to see Miss Sheila, and you will have no thocht for anyone but yourself. But I will get out the luggage—oh, yes; I will get out the luggage."

Sheila, in truth, had but little luggage with her; but she remained on board the boat until Duncan was quite ready to start, for she did not wish just then to meet any of her friends in Stornoway. Then she stepped ashore, and crossed the quay, and got into

the waggonette; and the two horses, whom she had caressed for a moment, seemed to know that they were carrying Sheila back to her own country, from the speed with which they rattled out of the town, and away into the lonely moorland.

Mackenzie let them have their way. Past the solitary lakes they went, past the long stretches of undulating morass, past the lonely sheilings perched far up on the hills; and the rough and blustering wind blew about them, and the grey clouds hurried by, and the old, strong-bearded man who shook the reins and gave the horses their heads, could have laughed aloud in his joy that he was driving his daughter home. But Sheila—she sat there as one dead; and Mairi, timidly regarding her, wondered what the impassible face and the bewildered, sad eyes meant. Did she not smell the sweet strong scent of the heather? Had she no interest in the great birds that were circling in the air over by the Barbhas mountains? Where was the pleasure she used to exhibit in remembering the curious names of the small lakes they passed?

And lo! the rough grey day broke asunder, and a great blaze of fire appeared in the west, shining across the moors and touching the blue slopes of the distant hills. Sheila was getting near to the region of beautiful sunsets and lambent twilights, and the constant movement and mystery of the sea. Overhead the heavy clouds were still hurried on by the wind; and in the south the eastern slopes of the hills and the moors were getting to be of a soft purple; but all along the west, where her home was, lay a great flush of gold, and she knew that Loch Roag was shining there, and the gable of the house at Borvabost getting warm in the beautiful light.

"It is a good afternoon you will be getting to see Borva again," her father said to her; but all the answer she made was to ask her father not to stop at Garra-na-hina, but to drive straight on to Callernish. She would visit the people at Garra-na-hina some other day.

The boat was waiting for them at Callernish, and the boat was the *Maighdean-mhara*.

"How pretty she is! How have you kept her so well, Duncan?" said Sheila, her face lighting up for the first time, as she went down the path to the bright-painted little vessel that scarcely rocked in the water below.

"Bekass we neffer knew but that it was this week, or the week before, or the next week you would come back, Miss Sheila, and you would want your boat; but it wass Mr. Mackenzie himself, it wass he that did all the pentin of the boat, and it iss as well done as Mr. McNicol could have done it, and a great deal better than that mirover."

"Won't you steer her yourself, Sheila?" her father suggested, glad to see that she was at last being interested and pleased.

"Oh, yes; I will steer her, if I have not forgotten all the points that Duncan taught me."

"And I am sure you hef not done that, Miss Sheila," Duncan said; "for there wass no one knew Loch Roag better as you, not one, and you hef not been so long away; and when you tek the tiller in your hand, it will all come back to you just as if you wass going away from Borva the day before yesterday."

She certainly had not forgotten; and she was proud and pleased to see how well the shapely little craft performed its duties. They had a favourable wind, and ran rapidly along the opening channels, until, in due course, they glided into the well-known bay over

which, and shining in the yellow light from the sunset, they saw Sheila's house.

She had escaped so far the trouble of meeting friends; but she could not escape her friends in Borvabost. They had waited for her for hours, not knowing when the *Clansman* might arrive at Stornoway; and now they crowded down to the shore, and there was a great shaking of hands, and an occasional sob from some old crone, and a thousand repetitions of the familiar "And are you ferry well, Miss Sheila?" from small children who had come across from the village in defiance of mothers and fathers. And Sheila's face brightened into a wonderful gladness, and she had a hundred questions to ask for one answer she got, and she did not know what to do with the number of small brown fists that wanted to shake hands with her.

"Will you let Miss Sheila alone?" Duncan called out, adding something in Gaelic which came strangely from a man who sometimes reproved his own master for swearing. "Get away with you, you brats; it wass better you would be in your beds than bothering people that wass come all the way from Styornoway."

Then they all went up in a body to the house; and Scarlett, who had neither eyes, ears, nor hands but for the young girl who had been the very pride of her heart, was nigh driven to distraction by Mackenzie's stormy demands for oatcake, and glasses, and whisky. Scarlett angrily remonstrated with her husband for allowing this rabble of people to interfere with the comfort of Miss Sheila; and Duncan, taking her reproaches with great good-humour, contented himself with doing her work, and went and got the cheese, and the plates, and the whisky, while Scarlett, with a hundred endear-

ing phrases, was helping Sheila to take off her travelling things. And Sheila, it turned out, had brought with her in her portmanteau certain huge and wonderful cakes, not of oatmeal, from Glasgow; and these were soon on the great table in the kitchen, and Sheila herself distributing pieces to those small folks who were so awe-stricken by the sight of this strange dainty, that they forgot her injunctions and thanked her timidly in Gaelic.

"Well, Sheila, my lass," said her father to her, as they stood at the door of the house and watched the troop of their friends, children and all, go over the hill to Borvabost, in the red light of the sunset, "and are you glad to be home again?"

"Oh, yes," she said, heartily enough; and Mackenzie thought that things were going on favourably.

"You hef no such sunsets in the South, Sheila," he observed, loftily casting his eye around, although he did not usually pay much attention to the picturesqueness of his native island; "now look at the light there iss on Suainabhal. Do you see the red on the water down there, Sheila? Oh yes, I thought you would say it was ferry beautiful—it is a ferry good colour on the water. The water looks ferry well when it is red. You hef no such things in London—not any, Sheila. Now we must go indoors; for these things you can see any day here, and we must not keep our friends waiting."

An ordinary, dull-witted, or careless man might have been glad to have a little quiet after so long and tedious a journey; but Mr. Mackenzie was no such person. He had resolved to guard against Sheila's first evening at home being in any way languid or monotonous; and so he had asked one or two of his especial friends to remain and have supper with them.

Moreover, he did not wish the girl to spend the rest of the evening out-of-doors, when the melancholy time of the twilight drew over the hills, and the sea began to sound remote and sad. Sheila should have a comfortable evening indoors; and he would himself, after supper, when the small parlour was well lit up, sing for her one or two songs, just to keep the thing going, as it were. He would let nobody else sing. These Gaelic songs were not the sort of music to make people cheerful. And if Sheila herself would sing for them?

And Sheila did. And her father chose the songs for her, and they were the blithest he could find, and the girl seemed really in excellent spirits. They had their pipes and their hot whisky and water in this little parlour; Mr. Mackenzie explaining that although his daughter was accustomed to spacious and gilded drawing-rooms where such a thing was impossible, she would do anything to make her friends welcome and comfortable, and they might fill their glasses and their pipes with impunity. And Sheila sang again and again, all cheerful and sensible English songs; and she listened to the odd jokes and stories her friends had to tell her; and Mackenzie was delighted with the success of his plans and precautions. Was not her very appearance now a triumph? She was laughing, smiling, talking to everyone; he had not seen her so happy for many a day.

In the midst of it all, when the night had come on apace, what was this wild skirl outside that made everybody start? Mackenzie jumped to his feet, with an angry vow in his heart, that if this "teffle of a piper John" should come down the hill playing "Lochaber no more" or "Cha till mi tuilich," or any other mournful tune, he would have his chanter broken

in a thousand splinters over his head. But what was the wild air that came nearer and nearer, until John marched into the house, and came, with ribbons and pipes, to the very door of the room which was flung open to him? Not a very appropriate air, perhaps, for it was—

"The Campbells are coming, oho! oho!
The Campbells are coming, oho! oho!
The Campbells are coming to bonny Lochleven!
The Campbells are coming, oho! oho!"

but it was, to Mr. Mackenzie's rare delight, a right good joyous tune, and it was meant as a welcome to Sheila, and forthwith he caught the white-haired piper by the shoulder, and dragged him in, and said—

"Put down your pipes and come into the house, John! Put down your pipes, and tek off your bonnet, and we shall hef a good dram together this night, by Kott! And it is Sheila herself will pour out the whisky for you, John; and she is a good Highland girl, and she knows the piper was never born that could be hurt by whisky, and the whisky was neffer yet made that could hurt a piper. What do you say to that, John?"

John did not answer; he was standing before Sheila, with his bonnet in his hand, but with his pipes still proudly over his shoulder. And he took the glass from her, and called out "Shlainte!" and drained every drop of it out to welcome Mackenzie's daughter home.

CHAPTER XI.

The Voyage of the "Phœbe."

It was a cold morning in January, and up here among the Jura hills the clouds had melted into a small and chilling rain that fell ceaselessly. The great "Paps of Jura" were hidden in the mist; even the valleys near at hand were vague and dismal in the

pale fog; and the Sound of Islay, lying below, and the far sea beyond, were gradually growing undistinguishable. In a rude little sheiling, built on one of the plateaus of rock, Frank Lavender sat alone, listening to the plashing of the rain without. A rifle that he had just carefully dried lay across his knees. A brace of deerhounds had stretched out their paws on the earthen floor, and had put their long noses between their paws to produce a little warmth. It was, indeed, a cold and damp morning; and the little hut was pervaded with a smell of wet wood, and also of peat-ashes, for one of the gillies had tried to light a fire, but the peats had gone out.

It was Lavender who had let the fire go out. He had forgotten it. He was thinking of other things—of a song, mostly, that Sheila used to sing; and lines of it went hither and thither through his brain, as he recalled the sound of her voice:—

"Haste to thy barque,
Coastwise steer not;
Sail wide of Mull,
Jura near not!

"Farewell, she said,
Her last pang subduing,
Brave Mac Intyre,
Costly thy wooing!"

There came into the sheiling a little wiry old keeper, with shaggy grey hair and keen black eyes.

"Cosh bless me!" he said, petulantly, as he wrung the rain out of his bonnet, "you hef let the peats go out, Mr. Lavender, and who will tell when the rain will go off?"

"It can't last long, Neil. It came on too suddenly for that. I thought we were going to get one fine day when we started this morning; but you don't often manage that here, Neil."

"Indeed no, sir," said Neil, who was not a native of Jura, and was as eager as anyone to abuse the weather prevailing there; "it is a ferry bad place for the weather. If the Almichty were to tek the sun away a' tagether, it would be days and weeks and days before you would find it oot. But it iss a good thing, sir, you will get the one stag before the mist came down; and he is not a stag, mirover, but a fine big hart, and a royal, too, and I hef not seen many finer in the Jura hills. Oh yes, sir, when he was crossing the burn, I made out his points ferry well, and I wass saying to myself, 'Now, if Mr. Lavender will get this one, it will be a grand day this day, and it will make up for many a wet day among the hills.'"

"They haven't come back with the pony yet?" Lavender asked, laying down his gun and going to the door of the hut.

"Oh no," Neil said, following him, "it iss a long way to get the powny, and maybe they will stop at Mr. MacDougall's to hef a dram. And Mr. MacDougall was saying to me yesterday that the ferry next time you wass shoot a royal, he would have the horns dressed and the head stuffed to make you a present, for he is ferry proud of the picture of Miss Margaret, and he will say to me many's sa time that I wass to gif you the ferry best shooting, and not to be afraid of disturbing sa deer, when you had a mind to go out. And I am not sure, sir, we will not get another stag to tek down with us yet, if the wind would carry away the mist, for the rain that is nearly off now, and as you are very wet, sir, already, it is no matter if we go down through the glen and cross the water to get the side of Ben Bheulah."

"That is true enough, Neil; and I fancy the clouds

are beginning to lift. And there they come with the pony."

Neil directed his glass towards a small group that appeared to be coming up the side of the valley below them, and that was still at some considerable distance.

"Cosh bless me!" he cried, "what is that? There iss two strangers—oh yes, indeed, and mirover and there is one of them on the pony."

Lavender's heart leaped within him. If they were strangers, they were coming to see him; and how long was it since he had seen the face of any one of his old friends and companions? It seemed to him years.

"Is it a man or a woman on the pony, Neil?" he asked, hurriedly, with some wild fancy flashing through his brain. "Give me the glass!"

"Oh, it is a man," said Neil, handing over the glass. "What would a woman be doing up sa hills on a morning like this?"

The small party below came up out of the grey mist; and Lavender in the distance heard a long view-halloo.

"Cott tam them!" said Neil, at a venture. "There is not a deer on Benan Cabrach that will not hear them!"

"But if these strangers are coming to see me, I fear we must leave the deer alone, Neil."

"Ferry well, sir, ferry well, sir, it is a bad day whatever; and it is not many strangers will come to Jura. I suppose they hef come to Port Ascaig, and taken the ferry across the Sound."

"I am going to meet them on chance," Lavender said, and he set off along the side of the deep valley, leaving Neil with the dogs and the rifles.

"Hillo, Johnny!" he cried, in amazement, when he came upon the advancing group. "And you, Mosenberg! By Jove, how did you ever get here?"

There was an abundance of hand-shaking and incoherent questions when young Mosenberg jumped down on the wet heather, and the three friends had actually met. Lavender scarcely knew what to say: these two faces were so strange, and yet so familiar; their appearance there was so unexpected, his pleasure so great.

"I can't believe my eyes yet, Johnny. Why did you bring him here? Don't you know what you'll have to put up with in this place. Well, this does do a fellow's heart good. I am awfully pleased to see you, and it is very kind of you——"

"But I am very cold," the handsome Jew-boy said, swinging his arms and stamping his feet. "Wet boots, wet carts, wet roads, wet saddles, and everywhere cold, cold, cold——"

"And he won't drink whisky, so what is he to expect?" Johnny Eyre said.

"Come along up to a little hut here," Lavender said, "and we'll try to get a fire lit. And I have some brandy there——"

"And you have plenty of water to mix with it," said the boy, looking mournfully around. "Very good. Let us have the fire and the warm drink; and then, you know the story of the music that was frozen in the trumpet, and that all came out when it was thawed at a fire? When we get warm we have very great news to tell you—oh, very great news indeed."

"I don't want any news—I want your company. Come along, like good fellows, and leave the news for afterwards. The men are going on with a pony to fetch a stag that has been shot—they won't be back for an hour, I suppose, at the soonest. This is the sheiling up here, where the brandy is secreted. Now, Neil, help us to get up a blaze. If any of you have

newspapers, letters, or anything that will set a few sticks on fire——"

"I have a box of wax matches," Johnny said, "and I know how to light a peat-fire better than any man in the country."

He was not very successful at first, for the peats were a trifle damp; but in the end he conquered, and a very fair blaze was produced, although the smoke that filled the sheiling had nearly blinded Mosenberg's eyes. Then Lavender produced a small tin pot and a solitary tumbler; and they boiled some water, and lit their pipes, and made themselves seats of peat round the fire. All the while a brisk conversation was going on, some portions of which astonished Lavender considerably.

For months back, indeed, he had almost cut himself off from the civilized world. His address was known to one or two persons; and sometimes they sent him a letter; but he was a bad correspondent. The news of his aunt's death did not reach him till a fortnight after the funeral; and then it was by a singular chance that he noticed it in the columns of an old newspaper.

"That is the only thing I regret about coming away," he was saying to these two friends of his; "I should like to have seen the old woman before she died. She was very kind to me."

"Well," said Johnny Eyre, with a shake of the head, "that is all very well; but a mere outsider like myself—you see it looks to me a little unnatural that she should go and leave her money to a mere friend, and not to her own relations——"

"I am very glad she did," Lavender said. "I had as good as asked her to do it long before. And Ted Ingram will make a better use of it than I ever did."

"It is all very well for you to say so now, after all this fuss about those two pictures; but suppose she had left you to starve?"

"Never mind suppositions," Lavender said, to get rid of the subject. "Tell me, Mosenberg, how is that overture of yours getting on?"

"It is nearly finished," said the lad, with a flush of pleasure, "and I have shown it in rough to two or three good friends, and—shall I tell you?—it may be performed at the Crystal Palace. But that is a chance. And the fate of it, that is also a chance. But you—you have succeeded all at once, and brilliantly, and all the world is talking of you; and yet you go away among mountains, and live in the cold and wet, and you might as well be dead."

"What an ungrateful boy it is!" Lavender cried. "Here you have a comfortable fire, and hot brandy-and-water, and biscuits, and cigars if you wish; and you talk about people wishing to leave these things and die! Don't you know that in half-an-hour's time you will see that pony come back with a deer—a royal hart—slung across it; and won't you be proud when MacDougall takes you out and gives you a chance of driving home such a prize? Then you will carry the horns back to London, and you will have them put up, and you will discourse to your friends of the span, and the pearls of the antlers, and the crockets? To-night after supper you will see the horns and the head brought into the room, and if you fancy that you yourself shot the stag, you will see that this life among the hills has its compensations."

"It is a very cold life," the lad said, passing his hands over the fire.

"That is because you won't drink anything," said

Johnny Eyre, against whom no such charge could be brought. "And don't you know that the drinking of whisky is a provision invented by nature to guard human beings like you and me from cold and wet? You are flying in the face of Providence if you don't drink whisky among the Scotch hills."

"And have you people to talk to?" said Mosenberg, looking at Lavender with a vague wonder, for he could not understand why any man should choose such a life.

"Not many."

"What do you do on the long evenings when you are by yourself?"

"Well it isn't very cheerful; but it does a man good service sometimes to be alone for a time; it lets him find himself out."

"You ought to be up in London, to have all the praise of the people about your two pictures. Everyone is talking of them; the newspapers, too—have you seen the newspapers?"

"One or two. But all I know of these two pictures is derived from offers forwarded me by the Secretary at the Exhibition Rooms. I was surprised when I got them at first. But never mind them. Tell me more about the people one used to know. What about Ingram now? Has he cut the Board of Trade? Does he drive in the Park? Is he still in his rooms in Sloane Street?"

"Then you have had no letters from him?" Mosenberg said, with some surprise.

"No. Probably he does not know where I am. In any case——"

"But he is going to be married!" Mosenberg cried. "You did not know that? And to Mrs. Lorraine!"

"You don't say so! Why, he used to hate her—but that was before he knew her. To Mrs. Lorraine?"

"Yes. And it is amusing. She is so proud of him. And if he speaks at the table, she will turn away from you, as if you were not worth listening to, and have all her attention for him. And whatever is his opinion, she will defend that, and you must not disagree with her—oh, it is very amusing!" And the lad laughed, and shook back his curls.

"It is an odd thing," Lavender said; "but many a time, long before Ingram ever saw Mrs. Lorraine, I used to imagine these two married. I knew she was just the sort of clever, independent, clear-headed woman, to see Ingram's strong points, and rate them at their proper value. But I never expected anything of the sort, of course; for I had always a notion that some day or other he would be led into marrying some pretty, gentle, and soft-headed young thing, whom he would have to take through life in a protecting sort of way, and who would never be a real companion for him. So he is to marry Mrs. Lorraine, after all! Well, he won't become a man of fashion, despite all his money. He is sure to start a yacht, for one thing. And they will travel a deal, I suppose. I must write and congratulate him."

"I met him on the day I went to see your picture," Mosenberg said. "Mrs. Lorraine was looking at it a long time, and at last she came back and said, 'The sea in that picture makes me feel cold.' That was a compliment, was it not? Only you cannot get a good view very often; for the people will not stand back from the pictures. But everyone asks why you did not keep these two over for the Academy."

"I shall have other two for the Academy, I hope."

"Commissions?" Johnny asked, with a practical air.

"No. I have had some offers; but I prefer to leave the thing open. But you have not told me how you got here yet," Lavender added, continually breaking away from this subject of the pictures.

"In the *Phœbe*," Eyre said.

"Is she in the bay?"

"Oh no. We had to leave her at Port Ellen to get a few small repairs done, and Mosenberg and I came on by road to Port Ascaig. Mind you, she was quite small enough to come round the Mull at this time of the year."

"I should think so. What's your crew?"

"Two men and a lad, besides Mosenberg and myself, and I can tell you we had our hands full sometimes."

"You've given up open boats with stone ballast now," Lavender said, with a laugh.

"Rather. But it was no laughing matter," Eyre added, with a sudden gravity coming over his face. "It was the narrowest squeak I ever had, and I don't know now how I clung on to that place till the day broke. When I came to myself and called out for you, I never expected to hear you answer; and in the darkness, by Jove! your voice sounded like the voice of a ghost. How you managed to drag me so far up that seaweed I can't imagine; and then the dipping down and under the boat——"

"It was that dip down that saved me," Lavender said. "It brought me to; and made me scramble like a rat up the other side as soon as I felt my hands on the rock again. It was a narrow squeak, as you say, Johnny. Do you remember how black the place looked when the first light began to show in the sky; and how we kept each other awake by calling; and

how you called 'hurrah!' when we heard Donald; and how strange it was to find ourselves so near the mouth of the harbour, after all? During the night I fancied we must have been thrown on Battie Island, you know——"

"I do not like to hear about that," young Mosenberg said. "And always, if the wind came on strong, or if the skies grew black, Eyre would tell me all the story over again when we were in this boat coming down by Arran and Cantyre. Let us go out and see if they come with the deer. Has the rain stopped?"

At this moment, indeed, sounds of the approaching party were heard, and when Lavender and his friends went to the door, the pony, with the deer slung on to him, was just coming up. It was a sufficiently picturesque sight—the rude little sheiling with its peat-fire, the brown and wiry gillies, the slain deer roped on to the pony, and all around the wild magnificence of hill and valley clothed in moving mists. The rain had, indeed, cleared off; but these pale white fogs still clung around the mountains, and rendered the valleys vague and shadowy. Lavender informed Neil that he would make no further effort that day; he gave the men a glass of whisky all round; and then, with his friends, he proceeded to make his way down to the small white cottage fronting the Sound of Islay, which had been his home for months back.

Just before setting off, however, he managed to take young Mosenberg aside for a moment.

"I suppose," he said, with his eyes cast down," I suppose you heard something from Ingram of—of Sheila?"

"Yes," said the lad, rather bashfully. "Ingram had heard from her. She was still in Lewis."

"And well?"

"I think so; yes," said Mosenberg; and then he added, with some hesitation, "I should like to speak to you about it when we have the opportunity. There were some things that Mr. Ingram said—I am sure he would like you to know them."

"There was no message to me?" Lavender asked, in a low voice.

"From her? No. But it was the opinion of Mr. Ingram——"

"Oh, never mind that, Mosenberg," said the other, turning away wearily. "I suppose you won't find it too fatiguing to walk from here back? It will warm you, you know; and the old woman down there will get you something to eat. You may make it luncheon or dinner, as you like, for it will be nearly two by the time you get down. Then you can go for a prowl round the coast; if it does not rain, I shall be working as long as there is daylight. Then we can have a dinner and supper combined in the evening. You will get venison and whisky."

"Don't you ever have anything else?"

"Oh yes. The venison will be in honour of you. I generally have mutton and whisky."

"Look here, Lavender," the lad said, with considerable confusion, "the fact is—Eyre and I—we brought you a few things in the *Phœbe*—a little wine, you know, and some such things. To-morrow, if you could get a messenger to go down to Port Ellen—but no, I suppose we must go and work the boat up the Sound."

"If you do that, I must go with you," Lavender said, "for the chances are that your skipper doesn't know the currents in the Sound, and they are rather peculiar, I can tell you. So Johnny and you have brought me some wine. I wish we had it now, to

celebrate your arrival; for I am afraid I can offer you nothing but whisky."

The old Highland woman who had charge of the odd little cottage in which Lavender lived was put into a state of violent consternation by the arrival of these two strangers; but as Lavender said he would sleep on a couple of chairs, and give his bed to Mosenberg, and the sofa to Eyre, and as Mosenberg declared that the house was a marvel of neatness and comfort, and as Johnny assured her that he had frequently slept in a herring-barrel, she grew gradually pacified. There was little difficulty about plates and knives and forks at luncheon, which consisted of cold mutton and two bottles of ale that had somehow been overlooked; but all these minor inconveniences were soon smoothed over; and then Lavender, carrying his canvas under his arm, and a portable easel over his shoulder, went down to the shore, bade his companions good-bye for a couple of hours, and left them to explore the winding and rocky coast of Jura.

In the evening they had dinner in a small parlour, which was pretty well filled with a chest of drawers, a sofa, and a series of large canvasses. There was a peat-fire burning in the grate, and two candles on the table; but the small room did not get oppressively hot, for each time the door was opened a draught of cold sea-air rushed in from the passage, sometimes blowing out one of the candles, but always sweetening the atmosphere. Then Johnny had some fine tobacco with him; and Mosenberg had brought Lavender a present of a meerschaum pipe; and presently a small kettle of hot water was put in requisition, and the friends drew round the fire.

"Well, it *is* good of you to come and see a fellow

like this," Lavender said, with a very apparent and hearty gratitude in his face; "I can scarcely believe my eyes that it is true. And can you make any stay, Johnny? Have you brought your colours with you?"

"Oh no, I don't mean to work," Johnny said. "I have always had a fancy for a mid-winter cruise. It's a hardening sort of thing, you know. You soon get used to it, don't you, Mosenberg?"

And Johnny grinned.

"Not yet—I may afterwards," said the lad. "But at present this is more comfortable than being on deck at night when it rains and you know not where you are going."

"But that was only your own perversity. You might just as well have stopped in the cabin and played that cornopean, and made yourself warm and comfortable. Really, Lavender, it's very good fun; and if you only watch for decent weather, you can go anywhere. Fancy our coming round the Mull with the *Phœbe* yesterday! And we had quite a pleasant trip across to Islay."

"And where do you propose to go after leaving Jura?" Lavender asked.

"Well, you know, the main object of our cruise was to come and see you. But if you care to come with us for a few days, we will go wherever you like."

"If you are going further north, I must go with you," Lavender said, "for you are bound to drown yourself some day, Johnny, if some one doesn't take care of you."

There was no deep design in this project of Johnny's; but he had had a vague impression that Lavender might like to go north, if only to have a passing glimpse at the island he used to know.

"One of my fellows is well acquainted with the Hebrides," he said; "if you don't think it too much of a risk, I should like it myself; for those northern islands must look uncommonly wild and savage in winter; and one likes to have new experiences. Fancy, Mosenberg, what material you will get for your next piece—it will be full of storms, and seas, and thunder—you know how the wind whistles through the overture to the *Diamants de la Couronne*——"

"It will whistle through us," said the boy, with an anticipatory shiver; "but I do not mind the wind if it is not wet. It is the wet that makes a boat so disagreeable—everything is so cold and clammy—you can touch nothing, and when you put your head up in the morning—pah! a dash of rain and mist, and salt water altogether gives you a shock——"

"What made you come round the Mull, Johnny, instead of cutting through the Crinan?" Lavender asked of his friend.

"Well," said the youth, modestly, "nothing except that two or three men said we couldn't do it."

"I thought so," Lavender said. "And I see I must go with you, Johnny. You must play no more of these tricks. You must watch your time, and run her quietly up the Sound of Jura to Crinan; and watch again and get her up to Oban; and watch again and get her up to Loch Sligachan. Then you may consider. It is quite possible you may have fine, clear weather if there is a moderate north-east wind blowing——"

"A north-east wind!" Mosenberg cried.

"Yes," Lavender replied, confidently, for he had not forgotten what Sheila used to teach him; "that is your only chance. If you have been living in fog for a fortnight, you will never forget your gratitude to a

north-easter when it suddenly sets in to lift the clouds and show you a bit of blue sky. But it may knock us about a bit in crossing the Minch."

"We have come round the Mull, and we can go anywhere," Johnny said. "I'd back the *Phœbe* to take you safely to the West Indies; wouldn't you, Mosenberg?"

"Oh no," the boy said. "I would back her to take you, not to take me."

Two or three days thereafter the *Phœbe* was brought up the Sound from Port Ellen, and such things as were meant as a present to Lavender were landed. Then the three friends embarked; for the weather had cleared considerably, and there was, indeed, when they set out, a pale, wintry sunshine gleaming on the sea, and on the white deck and spars of the handsome little cutter which Johnny commanded. The *Phœbe* was certainly a great improvement on the crank craft in which he used to adventure his life on Loch Fyne; she was big enough, indeed, to give plenty of work to everybody on board of her, and when once she had got into harbour, and things put to rights, her chief state-room proved a jolly and comfortable little place enough. They had some pleasant evenings in this way after the work of the day was over; when the swinging lamps shone down on the table that was furnished with wine-glasses, bottles, cigars, and cards. Johnny was very proud of being in command, and of his exploit in doubling the Mull. He was continually consulting charts and compasses, and going on deck to communicate his last opinion to his skipper. Mosenberg, too, was getting better accustomed to the hardships of yachting, and learning how to secure a fair amount of comfort. Lavender never said that he wished to go near Lewis; but there was a sort of tacit

understanding that their voyage should tend in that direction.

They had a little rough weather on reaching Skye, and, in consequence, remained in harbour a couple of days. At the end of that time a happy opportunity presented itself of cutting across the Little Minch—the Great Minch was considered a trifle risky—to Loch Maddy in North Uist. They were now in the Western Islands; and strange indeed was the appearance which the bleak region presented at this time of the year—the lonely coasts, the multitudes of wild fowl, the half-savage, wondering inhabitants, the treeless wastes, and desolate rocks. What these remote and melancholy islands might have looked like in fog and misty rain could only be imagined, however; for fortunately, the longed-for north-easter had set in, and there were wan glimmerings of sunshine across the sea and the solitary shores. They remained in Loch Maddy but a single day; and then, still favoured by a brisk north-east breeze, made their way through the Sound of Harris, and got to leeward of the conjoint island of Harris and Lewis. There, indeed, were the great mountains which Lavender had seen many a time from the north; and now they were close at hand, and dark, and forbidding. The days were brief at this time, and they were glad to put into Loch Resort, which Lavender had once seen in company with old Mackenzie, when they had come into the neighbourhood on a salmon-fishing excursion.

The *Phœbe* was at her anchorage, the clatter on deck over, and Johnny came below to see what sort of repast could be got for the evening. It was not a very grand meal, but he said—

"I propose that we have a bottle of champagne to

celebrate our arrival at the island of Lewis. Did you ever see anything more successfully done? And now, if this wind continues, we can creep up to-morrow to Loch Roag, Lavender, if you would like to have a look at it."

For a moment the colour forsook Lavender's face. "No, thank you, Johnny," he was about to say, when his friend interrupted him.

"Look here, Lavender; I know you would like to see the place, and you can do it easily without being seen. No one knows me. When we anchor in the bay, I suppose Mr. Mackenzie—as is the hospitable and praiseworthy custom of these parts—will send a message to the yacht and ask us to dine with him. I, at any rate, can go up and call on him, and make excuses for you; and then I could tell you, you know——"

Johnny hesitated.

"Would you do that for me, Johnny?" Lavender said. "Well, you are a good fellow."

"Oh," Johnny said, lightly, "it's a capital adventure for me; and perhaps I could ask Mackenzie—Mr. Mackenzie, I beg your pardon—to let me have two or three clay pipes, for this brier root is rapidly going to the devil."

"He will give you anything he has in the house; you never saw such a hospitable fellow, Johnny. But you must take great care what you do."

"You trust to me. In the meantime, let's see what Pate knows about Loch Roag."

Johnny called down his skipper, a bluff, short, red-faced man, who presently appeared, his cap in his hand.

"Will you have a glass of champagne, Pate?"

"Oh, ay, sir," he said, not very eagerly.

"Would you rather have a glass of whisky?"

"Well, sir," Pate said, in accents that showed that his Highland pronunciation had been corrupted by many years' residence in Greenock, "I was thinkin' the whisky was a wee thing better for ye on a cauld nicht."

"Here you are, then. Now, tell me, do you know Loch Roag?"

"Oh, ay, fine. Many's the time I hiv been in to Borvabost."

"But," said Lavender, "do you know the Loch itself? Do you know the bay on which Mackenzie's house stands?"

"Weel, I'm no sae sure about that, sir. But if ye want to gang there, we can pick up some bit body at Borvabost that will tak' us round."

"Well," Lavender said, "I think I can tell you how to go. I know the channel is quite simple—there are no rocks about—and once you are round the point you will see your anchorage."

"It's twa or three years since I was there, sir," Pate remarked, as he put the glass back on the table; "I mind there was a daft auld man there that played the pipes."

"That was old John the Piper!" Lavender said. "Don't you remember Mr. Mackenzie, whom they call the King of Borva?"

"Weel, sir, I never saw him, but I was aware he was in the place. I have never been up here afore wi' a party o' gentlemen, and he wasna coming down to see the like o' us."

With what a strange feeling Lavender beheld, the following afternoon, the opening to the great Loch that he knew so well. He recognized the various rocky promontories, the Gaelic names of which Sheila

had translated for him. Down there in the south were the great heights of Suainabhal, and Cracabhal, and Mealasabhal. Right in front was the sweep of Borvabost Bay, and its huts, and its small garden patches; and up beyond it was the hill on which Sheila used to sit in the evening, to watch the sun go down behind the Atlantic. It was like entering again a world with which he had once been familiar, and in which he had left behind a peaceful happiness he had sought in vain elsewhere. Somehow, as the yacht dipped to the waves, and slowly made her way into the loch, it seemed to him that he was coming home —that he was returning to the old and quiet joys he had experienced there—that all the past time that had darkened his life was now to be removed. But when, at last, he saw Mackenzie's house high up there over the tiny bay, a strange thrill of excitement passed through him, and that was followed by a cold feeling of despair, which he did not seek to remove.

He stood on the companion, his head only being visible, and directed Pate until the *Phœbe* had arrived at her moorings; and then he went below. He had looked wistfully for a time up to the square, dark house, with its scarlet copings, in the vague hope of seeing some figure he knew; but now, sick at heart, and fearing that Mackenzie might make him out with a glass, he sat down in the state-room, alone, and silent, and miserable.

He was startled by the sound of oars, and got up and listened. Mosenberg came down and said—

"Mr. Mackenzie has sent a tall, thin man—do you know him?—to see who we are, and whether we will go up to his house."

"What did Eyre say?"

"I don't know. I suppose he is going."

Then Johnny himself came below. He was a sensitive young fellow; and at this moment he was very confused, excited, and nervous.

"Lavender," he said stammering somewhat, "I am going up now to Mackenzie's house. You know whom I shall see. Shall I take any message—if I see a chance—if your name is mentioned—a hint, you know——"

"Tell her," Lavender said, with a sudden pallor of determination in his face: but he stopped, and said abruptly, "Never mind, Johnny. Don't say anything about me."

"Not to-night, anyway," Johnny said to himself, as he drew on his best blue jacket, with its shining brass buttons, and went up the companion to see if the small boat was ready.

Johnny had had a good deal of knocking about the Western Highlands, and was familiar with the frank and ready hospitality which the local lairds—more particularly in the remote islands, where a stranger brought recent newspapers and a breath of the outer world with him—granted to all comers who bore with them the credentials of owning a yacht. But never before had he gone up to a strange house with such perturbation of spirit. He had been so anxious, too, that he had left no time for preparation. When he started up the hill, he could see, in the gathering dusk, that the tall keeper had just entered the house, and when he arrived there, he found absolutely nobody about the place.

In ordinary circumstances he would simply have walked in, and called some one from the kitchen. But he now felt himself somewhat of a spy; and was not

a little afraid of meeting the handsome Mrs. Lavender, of whom he had heard so much. There was no light in the passage; but there was a bright-red gloom in one of the windows, and, almost inadvertently, he glanced in there. What was this strange picture he saw? The red flame of the fire showed him the grand figures on the walls of Sheila's dining-room, and lit up the white table-cover and the crystal in the middle of the apartment. A beautiful young girl, clad in a tight blue dress, had just risen from beside the fire to light two candles that were on the table; and then she went back to her seat, and took up her sewing, but not to sew. For Johnny saw her gently kneel down beside a little bassinet that was a mass of wonderful pink and white, and he supposed the door in the passage was open, for he could hear a low voice humming some lullaby-song, sung by the young mother to her child. He went back a step, bewildered by what he had seen. Could he fly down to the shore, and bring Lavender up to look at this picture through the window, and beg of him to go in and throw himself on her forgiveness and mercy? He had not time to think twice. At this moment Mairi appeared in the dusky passage, looking a little scared, although she did not drop the plates she carried.

"Oh, sir, and are you the gentleman that has come in the yacht? And, Mr. Mackenzie, he is upstairs just now, but he will be down ferry soon; and will you come in and speak to Miss Sheila?"

"*Miss Sheila?*" he repeated to himself, with amazement; and the next moment he found himself before this beautiful young girl, apologizing to her, stammering, and wishing that he had never undertaken such a task, while he knew that all the time she was regard-

ing him with her large, calm, and gentle eyes, and that there was no trace of embarrassment in her manner.

"Will you take a seat by the fire until papa comes down?" she said. "We are very glad to have anyone come to see us; we do not have many visitors in the winter."

"But I am afraid," he stammered, "I am putting you to trouble——" and he glanced at the swinging pink and white couch.

"Oh no," Sheila said, with a smile, "I was just about to send my little boy to bed."

She lifted the sleeping child and rolled it in some enormous covering of white and silken-haired fur, and gave the small bundle to Mairi to carry to Scarlett.

"Stop a bit?" Johnny called out to Mairi; and the girl started and looked round, whereupon he said to Sheila, with much blushing, "Isn't there a superstition about an infant waking to find silver in its hand? I am sure you wouldn't mind my——"

"He cannot hold anything yet," Sheila said, with a smile.

"Then, Mairi, you must put this below his pillow —is not that the same thing for luck?" he said, addressing the young Highland girl as if he had known her all his life; and Mairi went away proud and pleased to have this precious bundle to carry, and talking to it with a thousand soft and endearing phrases in her native tongue.

Mackenzie came in, and found the two talking together.

"How do you do, sir?" he said, with a grave courtesy. "You are ferry welcome to the island, and if there is anything you want for the boat, you will hef it from us. She is a little thing to hef come so far."

"She's not very big," Johnny said, "but she's a thorough good sailor; and then we watch our time, you know. But I don't think we shall go further north than Lewis."

"Hef you no friends on board with you?" Mackenzie asked.

"Oh yes," Johnny answered; "two. But we did not wish to invade your house in a body. To-morrow——"

"To-morrow!" said Mackenzie, impatiently. "No, but to-night! Duncan, come here! Duncan, go down to the boat that has just come in and tell the gentlemen——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Johnny cried, "but my two friends are regularly done up—tired—they were just going to turn in when I left the yacht. To-morrow, now, you will see them——"

"Oh, ferry well, ferry well," said Mackenzie, who had hoped to have a big dinner-party for Sheila's amusement. "In any way, you will stop and hef some dinner? It is just ready—oh, yes—and it is not a ferry fine dinner; but it will be different from your cabin for you to sit ashore."

"Well, if you will excuse me," Johnny was about to say, for he was so full of the news that he had to tell that he would have sacrificed twenty dinners to have got off at this moment. But Mr. Mackenzie would take no denial. An additional cover was laid for the stranger, and Johnny sat down to stare at Sheila in a furtive way, and to talk to her father about everything that was happening in the great world.

"And what now is this," said Mackenzie, with a lofty and careless air, "what is this I see in the papers about pictures painted by a gentleman called Laven-

der? I hev a great interest in these exhibitions: perhaps you hev seen the pictures?"

Johnny blushed very red; but he hid his face over his plate; and presently he answered, without daring to look at Sheila—

"I should think I have seen them! Why, if you care for coast landscapes, I can tell you you never saw such thorough good work all your life! Why, everybody's talking of them—you never heard of a man making such a name for himself in so short a time."

He ventured to look up. There was a strange, proud light in the girl's face; and the effect of it on this bearer of good tidings was to make him launch into such praises of these pictures as considerably astonished old Mackenzie. As for Sheila, she was proud and happy, but not surprised. She had known in all along. She had waited for it patiently, and it had come at last, although she was not to share in his triumph.

"I know some people who know him," said Johnny, who had taken two or three glasses of Mackenzie's sherry, and felt bold; "and what a shame it is he should go away from all his friends and almost cease to have any communication with them. And then, of all the places in the world to spend a winter in, Jura is about the very——"

"Jura!" said Sheila, quickly, and he fancied that her face paled somewhat.

"I believe so," he said; "somewhere on the western coast, you know, over the Sound of Islay."

Sheila was obviously very much agitated; but her father said in a careless way, "Oh yes, Jura is not a ferry good place in the winter. And the west side you said? Ay, there are not many houses on the west

side; it is not a ferry good place to live in. But it will be ferry cheap, whatever."

"I don't think that is the reason of his living there," said Johnny, with a laugh.

"But," Mackenzie urged, rather anxiously, "you wass not saying he would get much for these pictures? Oh no, who will give much money for pictures of rocks and seaweed? Oh no!"

"Oh, won't they, though?" Johnny cried. "They give a good deal more for that sort of picture now than for the old-fashioned cottage-scenes, with a young lady, dressed in a drugget petticoat and a pink jacket, sitting peeling potatoes. Don't you make any mistake about that. The public is beginning to learn what real good work is, and, by Jove, don't they pay for it, too? Lavender got 800*l.* for the smaller of the two pictures I told you about."

Johnny was beginning to forget that the knowledge he was showing of Frank Lavender's affairs was suspiciously minute.

"Oh no, sir," Mackenzie said, with a frown. "It is all nonsense the stories that you hear. I hef had great experience of these exhibitions. I hef been to London several times, and every time I wass in the Exhibitions."

"But I should know something of it, too; for I am an artist myself."

"And do you get 800*l.* for a small picture?" Mackenzie asked, severely.

"Well, no," Johnny said, with a laugh. "But then I am a duffer."

After dinner, Sheila left the room; Johnny fancied he knew where she was going. He pulled in a chair to the fire, lit his pipe, and said he would have but

one glass of toddy, which Mackenzie proceeded to make for him. And then he said to the old King of Borva—

"I beg your pardon, sir; but will you allow me to suggest that that young girl who was in here before dinner should not call your daughter Miss Sheila before strangers?"

"Oh, it is very foolish!" said Mackenzie, "but it is an old habit, and they will not stop it. And Duncan, he is worse than anyone."

"Duncan, I suppose, is the tall fellow who waited at dinner?"

"Oh aye, that is Duncan."

Johnny's ingenious bit of stratagem had failed. He wanted to have old Mackenzie call his daughter Mrs. Lavender, so that he might have had occasion to open the question and plead for his friend. But the old man resolutely ignored the relationship between Lavender and his daughter, so far as this stranger was concerned; and so Johnny had to go away partly disappointed.

But another opportunity might occur; and in the meantime was not he carrying rare news down to the *Phœbe?* He had lingered too long in the house; but now he made up for lost time, and once or twice nearly missed his footing in running down the steep path. He had to find the small boat for himself, and go out on the slippery stones and seaweed to get into her. Then he pulled away from the shore, his oars striking white fire into the dark water, the water gurgling at the bow. Then he got into the shadow of the black hull of the yacht, and Pate was there to lower the little gangway.

When Johnny stepped on deck, he paused, in con-

siderable doubt as to what he should do. He wished to have a word with Lavender alone; how could he go down with such a message as he had to deliver to a couple of fellows probably smoking and playing chess?

"Pate," he said, "tell Mr. Lavender I want him to come on deck for a minute."

"He's by himsel', sir," Pate said. "He's been sitting by himsel' for the last hour. The young gentleman's lain doon."

Johnny went down into the little cabin; Lavender, who had neither book, nor cigar, nor any other sign of occupation near him, seemed in his painful anxiety almost incapable of asking the question that rose to his lips.

"Have you seen her, Johnny?" he said, at length, with his face looking strangely careworn.

Johnny was an impressionable young fellow. There were tears running freely down his cheeks, as he said—

"Yes, I have, Lavender; and she was rocking a child in a cradle."

CHAPTER XII.

Redintegratio Amoris.

THAT same night Sheila dreamed a strange dream; and it seemed to her that an angel of God came to her, and stood before her, and looked at her with his shining face and his sad eyes. And he said, "*Are you a woman, and yet slow to forgive? Are you a mother, and have you no love for the father of your child?*" It seemed to her that she could not answer. She fell on her knees before him, and covered her face with her hands, and wept. And when she raised her eyes again, the angel was gone; and in his place Ingram was there,

stretching out his hand to her, and bidding her rise and be comforted. Yet he, too, spoke in the same reproachful tones, and said—

"What would become of us all, Sheila, if none of our actions were to be condoned by time and repentance? What would become of us if we could not say, at some particular point of our lives, to the bygone time, that we had left it, with all its errors, and blunders, and follies, behind us, and would, with the help of God, start clear on a new sort of life? What would it be if there were no forgetfulness for any of us—no kindly veil to come down and shut out the memory of what we have done—if the staring record were to be kept for ever before our eyes? And you are a woman, Sheila—it should be easy for you to forgive, and to encourage, and to hope for better things of the man you love. Has he not suffered enough? Have you no word for him?"

The sound of her sobbing in the night-time brought her father to the door. He tapped at the door, and said—

"What is the matter, Sheila?"

She awoke with a slight cry; and he went into the room and found her in a strangely troubled state, her hands outstretched to him, her eyes wet and wild.

"Papa, I have been very cruel. I am not fit to live any more. There is no woman in the world would have done what I have done."

"Sheila!" he said, "you hef been dreaming again about all that folly and nonsense. Lie down, like a good lass. You will wake the boy if you do not lie down and go to sleep; and to-morrow we will pay a visit to the yacht that hass come in, and you will ask the gentlemen to look at the *Maighdean-mhara*."

"Papa," she said, "to-morrow I want you to take me to Jura."

"To Jura, Sheila? You cannot go to Jura! You cannot leave the baby with Mairi, Sheila."

"I will take him with me," she said.

"Oh, it is not possible at all, Sheila. But I will go to Jura. Oh yes, I will go to Jura. Indeed, I was thinking last night that I would go to Jura."

"Oh no, *you* must not go," she cried. "You would speak harshly—and he is very proud—and we should never see each other again. Papa, I know you will do this for me—you will let me go——"

"It is foolish of you, Sheila," her father said, "to think that I do not know how to arrange such a thing without making a quarrel of it. But you will see all about it in the morning. Just now, you will lie down, like a good lass, and go to sleep. So good night, Sheila, and do not think of it any more till the morning."

She thought of it all through the night, however. She thought of her sailing away down through the cold wintry seas to search that lonely coast. Would the grey dawn break with snow; or would the kindly heavens lend her some fair sunlight as she set forth on her lonely quest? And all the night through she accused herself of being hard of heart; and blamed herself, indeed, for all that had happened in the bygone time. Just as the day was coming in she fell asleep; and she dreamed that she went to the angel whom she had seen before, and knelt down at his feet, and repeated in some vague way the promises she had made on her marriage morning. With her head bent down, she said that she would live and die a true wife, if only another chance were given her. The

angel answered nothing; but he smiled with his sad eyes, and put his hand for a moment on her head, and then disappeared. When she woke Mairi was in the room, silently stealing away the child; and the white daylight was clear in the windows.

She dressed with trembling hands, and yet there was a faint suffused sense of joy in her heart. She wondered if her father would keep to his promise of the night before, or whether it had been made to get her to rest. In any case, she knew that he could not refuse her much; and had not he himself said that he intended going away down to Jura?

"Sheila, you are not looking well this morning," her father said; "it is foolish of you to lie awake and think of such things. And as for what you wass saying about Jura, how can you go to Jura? We hef no boat big enough for that. I could go—oh yes, I could go—but the boat I would get at Stornoway you could not go in it at all, Sheila; and as for the baby——"

"But then, Papa," she said, "did not the gentleman who was here last night say they were going back by Jura? And it is a big yacht; and he has only two friends on board. He might take us down."

"You cannot ask a stranger, Sheila. Besides, the boat is too small a one for this time of the year. I should not like to see you go in her, Sheila."

"I have no fear," the girl said.

"No fear!" her father said, impatiently. "No, of course you hef no fear—that is the mischief. You will tek no care of yourself whatever."

"When is the young gentleman coming up this morning?"

"Oh, he will not come up again till I go down.

Will you go down to the boats, Sheila, and go on board of her?"

Sheila assented; and some half hour thereafter she stood at the door, clad in her tight-fitting blue serge, with the hat and sea-gull's wing over her splendid masses of hair. It was an angry-looking morning enough; rags of grey cloud were being hurried past the shoulders of Suainabhal; a heavy surf was beating on the shore.

"There is going to be rain, Sheila," her father said, smelling the moisture in the keen air. "Will you hef your waterproof?"

"Oh no," she said; "if I am to meet strangers, I cannot wear a waterproof."

The sharp wind had brought back the colour to her cheeks; and there was some gladness in her eyes. She knew she might have a fight for it, before she could persuade her father to set sail in this strange boat; but she never doubted for a moment—recollecting the gentle face and modest manner of the youthful owner—that he would be really glad to do her a service, and she knew that her father's opposition would give way.

"Shall we take Bras, papa?"

"No, no!" her father said; "we will hef to go in a small boat. I hope you will not get wet, Sheila—there is a good breeze on the water this morning."

"I think they are much safer in here than going round the islands just at present," Sheila said.

"Ay, you are right there, Sheila," her father said, looking at the direction of the wind. "They got in in ferry good time. And they may hef to stay here for a while before they can face the sea again."

"And we shall become very great friends with

them, Papa; and they will be glad to take us to Jura," she said, with a smile; for she knew there was not much of the hospitality of Borvabost bestowed with ulterior motives.

They went down the steep path to the bay, where the *Phœbe* was lurching and heaving in the rough swell, her bowsprit sometimes nearly catching the crest of a wave. No one was on deck. How were they to get on board?

"They can't hear you in this wind," Sheila said. "We will have to haul down our own boat."

And that, indeed, they had to do; though the work of getting the little thing down the beach was not very arduous for a man of Mackenzie's build.

"I am going to pull you out to the yacht, papa," Sheila said.

"Indeed you will do no such thing," her father said, indignantly. "As if you wass a fisherman's lass, and the gentlemen never wass seeing you before. Sit down in the stern, Sheila, and hold on ferry tight, for it is a rough water for this little boat."

They had almost got out indeed to the yacht before anyone was aware of their approach; but Pate appeared in time to seize the rope that Mackenzie flung him, and, with a little scrambling, they were at last safely on board. The noise of their arrival, however, startled Johnny Eyre, who was lying on his back smoking a pipe after breakfast. He jumped up, and said to Mosenberg, who was his only companion—

"Hillo! here's this old gentleman come on board. He knows you? What's to be done?"

"Done?" said the boy, with a moment's hesitation; and then a flush of decision sprang into his face. "Ask him to come down. Yes; I will speak to him,

and tell him that Lavender is on the island. Perhaps he meant to go into the house; who knows? If he did not, let us make him!"

"All right," said Johnny; "let's go a buster."

Then he called up the companion to Pate, to send the gentleman below, while he flung a few things aside, to make the place more presentable. Johnny had been engaged, a few minutes before, in sewing a button on a woollen shirt; and that article of attire does not look well beside a breakfast-table.

His visitor began to descend the narrow wooden steps; and presently Mackenzie was heard to say—

"Tek great care, Sheila. The brass is ferry slippery."

"Oh, thunder!" Johnny said, looking to Mosenberg.

"Good morning, Mr. Eyre," said the old King of Borva, stooping to get into the cabin; "it is a rough day you are getting. Sheila, mind your head till you have passed the door."

Mackenzie came forward to shake hands, and in doing so caught sight of Mosenberg. The whole truth flashed upon him in a moment; and he instantaneously turned to Sheila, and said, quickly—

"Sheila, go up on deck for a moment."

But she, too, had seen the lad; and she came forward, with a pale face, but with a perfectly self-possessed manner, and said, "How do you do? It is a surprise, your coming to the island; but you often used to talk of it."

"Yes," he stammered, as he shook hands with her and her father, "I often wished to come here. What a wild place it is! And have you lived here, Mrs. Lavender, all the time since you left London?"

"Yes, I have."

Mackenzie was getting very uneasy. Every moment

he expected Lavender would enter this confined little cabin; and was this the place for these two to meet, before a lot of acquaintances?

"Sheila," he said, "it is too close for you here, and I am going to have a pipe with the gentlemen. Now if you wass a good lass, you would go ashore again, and go up to the house, and say to Mairi that we will all come for luncheon at one o'clock, and she must get some fish up from Borvabost. Mr. Eyre, he will send a man ashore with you in his own boat, that is bigger than mine, and you will show him the creek to put into. Now go away, like a good lass, and we will be up ferry soon—oh yes, we will be up directly at the house."

"I am sure," Sheila said to Johnny Eyre, "we can make you more comfortable up at the house than you are here, although it is a nice little cabin." And then she turned to Mosenberg, and said, "And we have a great many things to talk about."

"Could she suspect?" Johnny asked himself, as he escorted her to the boat, and pulled her in himself to the shore. Her face was pale, and her manner a trifle formal; otherwise she showed no sign. He watched her go along the stones till she reached the path; then he pulled out to the *Phœbe* again, and went down below to entertain his host of the previous evening.

Sheila walked slowly up the rude little path, taking little heed of the blustering wind and the hurrying clouds. Her eyes were bent down; her face was pale. When she got to the top of the hill, she looked, in a blank sort of way, all round the bleak moorland; but probably she did not expect to see anyone there. Then she walked, with rather an uncertain step, into the house.

She looked into the room, the door of which stood

open. Her husband sate there, with his arms outstretched on the table, and his head buried in his hands. He did not hear her approach, her footfall was so light; and it was with the same silent step she went into the room, and knelt down beside him, and put her hands and face on his knee, and said simply—

"I beg for your forgiveness."

He started up and looked at her as though she were some spirit, and his own face was haggard and strange.

"Sheila," he said, in a low voice, laying his hand gently on her head, "it is I who ought to be there, and you know it. But I cannot meet your eyes. I am not going to ask for your forgiveness just yet—I have no right to expect it. All I want is this—if you will let me come and see you just as before we were married—and if you will give me a chance of winning your consent over again—we can at least be friends until then—— But why do you cry, Sheila? You have nothing to reproach yourself with."

She rose, and regarded him for a moment with her streaming eyes; and then, moved by the passionate entreaty of her face, and forgetting altogether the separation and time of trial he had proposed, he caught her to his bosom, and kissed her forehead, and talked soothingly and caressingly to her, as if she were a child.

"I cry," she said, "because I am happy—because I believe all that time is over—because I think you will be kind to me. And I will try to be a good wife to you; and you will forgive me all that I have done."

"You are heaping coals of fire on my head, Sheila," he said, humbly. "You know I have nothing to forgive. As for you—I tell you I have no right to expect your forgiveness yet. But I think you will find out

by and by that my repentance is not a mere momentary thing. I have had a long time to think over what has happened—and what I lost when I lost you, Sheila."

"But you have found me again," the girl said, pale a little, and glad to sit down on the nearest couch, while she held his hand and drew him towards her. "And now I must ask you for one thing."

He was sitting beside her: he feared no longer to meet the look of those earnest, meek, affectionate eyes.

"This is it," she said. "If we are to be together, not what we were, but something quite different from that, will you promise me never to say one word about what is past—to shut it out altogether—to forget it?"

"I cannot, Sheila," he said. "Am I to have no chance of telling you how well I know how cruel I was to you—how sorry I am for it?"

"No," she said, firmly. "If you have some things to regret, so have I; and what is the use of competing with each other as to which has the most forgiveness to ask for? Frank, dear, you will do this for me. You will promise never to speak one word about that time."

How earnest the beautiful, sad face was! He could not withstand the entreaty of the piteous eyes. He said to her, abashed by the great love that she showed, and hopeless of making other reparation than obedience to her generous wish—

"Let it be so, Sheila. I will never speak a word about it. You will see otherwise than in words whether I forget what is passed, and your goodness in letting it go. But, Sheila," he added, with downcast face, "Johnny Eyre was here last night—he told me——" He had to say no more. She took his hand, and led him gently and silently out of the room.

Meanwhile the old King of Borva had been spending a somewhat anxious time down in the cabin of the *Phœbe*. Many and many a day had he been planning a method by which he might secure a meeting between Sheila and her husband; and now it had all come about without his aid, and in a manner which rendered him unable to take any precautions. He did not know but that some awkward accident might destroy all the chances of the affair. He knew that Lavender was in the island. He had frankly asked young Mosenberg as soon as Sheila had left the yacht.

"Oh yes," the lad said, "he went away into the island early this morning. I begged of him to go to your house; he did not answer. But I am sure he will. I know he will."

"My Kott!" Mackenzie said, "and he has been wandering about the island all the morning, and he will be very faint and hungry; and a man is neffer in a good temper then for making up a quarrel. If I had known the last night, I could hef had dinner with you all here, and we should hef given him a good glass of whisky, and then it wass a good time to tek him up to the house."

"Oh, you may depend on it, Mr. Mackenzie," Johnny Eyre said, "that Lavender needs no stimulus of that sort to make him desire a reconciliation. No, I should think not. He has done nothing but brood over this affair ever since he left London; and I should not be surprised if you scarcely knew him, he is so altered. You would fancy he had lived ten years in the time."

"Ay, ay," Mackenzie said, not listening very attentively, and evidently thinking more of what might be happening elsewhere; "but I was thinking, gentle-

men, it wass time for us to go ashore, and go up to the house, and hef something to eat."

"I thought you said one o'clock for luncheon, sir," young Mosenberg said.

"One o'clock!" Mackenzie repeated, impatiently; "who the teffle can wait till one o'clock, if you hef been walking about an island since the daylight with nothing to eat or drink."

Mr. Mackenzie forgot that it was not Lavender he had asked to lunch.

"Oh yes," he said, "Sheila hass had plenty of time to send down to Borvabost for some fish; and by the time you get up to the house, you will see that it is ready."

"Very well," Johnny said, "we can go up to the house, any way."

He went up the companion, and he had scarcely got his head above the level of the bulwarks when he called back——

"I say, Mr. Mackenzie, here is Lavender on the shore, and your daughter is with him. Do they want to come on board do you think? Or do they want us to go ashore?"

Mackenzie uttered a few phrases in Gaelic, and got up on deck instantly. There, sure enough, was Sheila, with her hand on her husband's arm; and they were both looking towards the yacht. The wind was blowing too strong for them to call. Mackenzie wanted himself to pull in for them; but this was overruled; and Pate was despatched.

An awkward pause ensued. The three standing on deck were sorely perplexed as to the forthcoming interview, and as to what they should do. Were they to

rejoice over a reconciliation; or ignore the fact altogether, and simply treat Sheila as Mrs. Lavender? Her father, indeed, fearing that Sheila would be strangely excited, and would probably burst into tears, wondered what he could get to scold her about.

Fortunately, an incident, partly ludicrous, broke the awkwardness of their arrival. The getting on deck was a matter of some little difficulty; in the scuffle Sheila's small hat with its snow-white feather got unloosed somehow, and the next minute it was whirled away by the wind into the sea. Pate could not be sent after it just at the moment, and it was rapidly drifting away to leeward, when Johnny Eyre, with a laugh and a "Here goes!" plunged in after the white feather that was dripping and rising in the waves like a sea-gull. Sheila uttered a slight cry, and caught her husband's arm. But there was not much danger. Johnny was an expert swimmer; and in a few minutes he was seen to be making his way backward with one arm, while in the other hand he held Sheila's hat. Then Pate had by this time got the small boat round to leeward; and very shortly after Johnny, dripping like a Newfoundland dog, came on deck and presented the hat to Sheila, amidst a vast deal of laughter.

"I am so sorry," she said; "but you must change your clothes quickly—I hope you will have no harm from it."

"Not I," he said, "but my beautiful white decks have got rather into a mess. I am glad you saw them while they were dry, Mrs. Lavender. Now I am going below to make myself a swell, for we're all going to have luncheon on shore, ain't we?"

Johnny went below very well pleased with himself. He had called her Mrs. Lavender without wincing. He

had got over all the awkwardness of a second introduction by the happy notion of plunging after the hat. He had to confess, however, that the temperature of the sea was not just what he could have preferred for a morning bath.

By and by he made his appearance in his best suit of blue and brass buttons, and asked Mrs. Lavender if she would now come down and see the cabin.

"I think you want a good glass of whisky," old Mackenzie said, as they all went below, "the water it is ferry cold just now."

"Yes," Johnny said, blushing, "we shall all celebrate the capture of the hat."

It was the capture of the hat, then, that was to be celebrated by this friendly ceremony. Perhaps it was; but there was no mirth now on Sheila's face.

"And you will drink first, Sheila," her father said, almost solemnly, "and you will drink to your husband's health."

Sheila took the glass of raw whisky in her hand; and looked round timidly.

"I cannot drink this, papa," she said. "If you will let me——"

"You will drink that glass to your husband's health, Sheila," old Mackenzie said, with unusual severity.

"She shall do nothing of the sort if she doesn't like it!" Johnny Eyre cried, suddenly—not caring whether it was the wrath of old Mackenzie or of the devil that he was braving; and forthwith he took the glass out of Sheila's hand, and threw the whisky on the floor. Then he pulled out a champagne bottle from a basket and said, "This is what Mrs. Lavender will drink."

Mackenzie looked staggered for a moment. He had never been so braved before. But he was not in a quarrelsome mood on such an occasion; so he burst into a loud laugh, and cried——

"Well, did ever any man see the like o' that? Good whisky—ferry good whisky—and flung on the floor as if it was water; and as if there wass no one in the boat that would hef drunk it. But no matter, Mr. Eyre, no matter; the lass will drink whatever you give her, for she's a good lass; and if we hef all to drink champagne that is no matter too; but there is a man or two up on deck that would not like to know the whisky was spoiled."

"Oh," Johnny said, "there is still a drop left for them. And this is what you must drink, Mrs. Lavender."

Lavender had sat down in a corner of the cabin, his eyes averted. When he heard Sheila's name mentioned he looked up, and she came forward to him. She said, in a simple way, "I drink this to you, my dear husband," and at the same moment the old King of Borva came forward and held out his hand, and said, "Yes; and by Kott, I drink to your health, too, with ferry good will."

Lavender started to his feet.

"Wait a bit, Mr. Mackenzie. I have got something to say to you before you ought to shake my hand."

But Sheila interposed quickly. She put her hand on his arm, and looked into his face.

"You will keep your promise to me," she said; and that was an end of the matter. The two men shook hands; there was nothing said between them, then or again, of what was over and gone.

They had a pleasant enough luncheon together, up in that quaint room, with the Tyrolese pictures on

the wall; and Duncan for once respected old Mackenzie's threats as to what would happen if he called Sheila anything but Mrs. Lavender before these strangers. For some time Lavender sat almost silent; and answered Sheila, who continuously talked to him, in little else than monosyllables. But he looked at her a great deal, sometimes in a wistful sort of way, as if he were trying to recall the various fancies her face used to produce in his imagination.

"Why do you look at me so?" she said in an undertone.

"Because I have made a new friend," he said.

But when Mackenzie began to talk of the wonders of the island and the seas around it, and to beg the young yachtsmen to prolong their stay, Lavender joined with a will in that conversation, and added his entreaties.

"Then you are going to stay?" Johnny Eyre said, looking up.

"Oh, yes," he answered, as if the alternative of going back with them had not presented itself to him.

"For one thing, I have got to look out for a place where I can build a house. That is what I mean to do with my savings just at present; and if you would come with me, Johnny, and have a prowl round the island, to find out some pretty little bay with a good anchorage in it—for you know I am going to steal that *Maighdean-mhara* from Mr. Mackenzie—then we can begin and make ourselves architects, and plan out the place that is to be. And then some day——"

Mackenzie had been sitting in mute astonishment; but he suddenly broke in upon his son-in-law.

"On this island? No, by Kott, you will not do that. On this island? And with all the people at Stornoway? Hoots, no, that will neffer do; Sheila, she

hass no one to speak to on this island as a young lass should hef; and you—what would you do yourself in the bad weather? But there is Stornoway—oh yes, that is a fine big place, and many people you will get to know there, and you will hef the newspapers and the letters at once; and there will be always boats there, that you can go to Oban, to Greenock, to Glasgow—anywhere in the world—whenever you hef a mind to do that; and then when you go to London, as you will hef to go many times, there will be plenty there to look after your house when it is shut up, and keep the rain out, and the paint and the paper good, more as could be done on this island. Oh, this island!—how would you live on this island?"

The old King of Borva spoke quite impatiently and contemptuously of the place. You would have thought his life on this island was a species of penal servitude; and that he dwelt in his solitary house only to think with a vain longing of the glories and delights of Stornoway. Lavender knew well what prompted these scornful comments on Borva. The old man was afraid that the island would really be too dull for Sheila and her husband; and that, whereas the easy compromise of Stornoway might be practicable, to set up house in Borva might lead them to abandon the north altogether.

"From what I have heard of it from Mr. Lavender," Johnny said, with a laugh, "I don't think this island such a dreadful place; and I'm hanged if I have found it so, so far."

"But you will know nothing about it—nothing whateffer," said Mackenzie, petulantly. "You do not know the bad weather, when you cannot go down the

Loch to Callernish; and you might hef to go to London just then."

"Well, I suppose London could wait," Johnny said.

Mackenzie began to get angry with this young man.

"You hef not been to Stornoway," he said, severely.

"No, I haven't," Johnny replied, with much coolness, "and I don't hanker after it. I get plenty of town life in London; and when I come up to the sea and the islands I'd rather pitch my tent with you, sir, than live in Stornoway."

"Oh, but you don't know, Johnny, how fine a place Stornoway is," Lavender said, hastily, for he saw the old man was beginning to get vexed. "Stornoway was a beautiful little town, and it is on the sea, too——"

"And it hass fine houses, and ferry many people, and ferry good society whatever," Mackenzie added, with some touch of indignation.

"But you see, this is how it stands, Mr. Mackenzie," Lavender put in, humbly. "We should have to go to London from time to time, and we should then get quite enough of city life, and you might find an occasional trip with us not a bad thing. But up here I should have to look on my house as a sort of workshop. Now, with all respect to Stornoway, you must admit that the coast about here is a little more picturesque. Besides, there's another thing. It would be rather more difficult at Stornoway to take a rod or a gun out of a morning. Then there would be callers, bothering you at your work. Then Sheila would have far less liberty in going about by herself."

"Eighthly and tenthly, you've made up your mind to have a house here," cried Johnny Eyre with a loud laugh.

"Sheila says she would like to have a billiard-

room," her husband continued. "Where could you get that in Stornoway?"

"And you must have a large room for a piano, to sing in, and play in," the young Jew-boy said, looking at Sheila.

"I should think a one-storeyed house, with a large verandah, would be the best sort of thing," Lavender said, "both for the sun and the rain; and then one could have one's easle outside, you know. Suppose we all go for a walk round the shore by-and-by; there is too much of a breeze to take the *Phœbe* down the loch."

So the King of Borva was quietly overruled and his dominions invaded in spite of himself. Sheila could not go out with the gentlemen just then; she was to follow in about an hour's time; meanwhile they buttoned their coats, pulled down their caps tight, and set out to face the grey skies and the wintry wind. Just as they were passing away from the house, Mackenzie, who was walking in front with Lavender, said, in a cautious sort of way——

"You will want a deal of money to build this house you wass speaking about—for it will hef to be all stone and iron, and ferry strong whatever, or else it will be a plague to you from the one year to the next with the rain getting in."

"Oh yes," Lavender said, "it will have to be done well once for all; and what with rooms big enough to paint in, and play billiards in, and also a bedroom or two for friends who may come to stay with us, it will be an expensive business. But I have been very lucky, Mr. Mackenzie. It isn't the money I have, but the commissions I am offered, that warrant me going in for this house. I'll tell you about all these things

afterwards. In the meantime I shall have 2,400*l.*, or thereabouts, in a couple of months."

"But you hef more than that now," Mackenzie said, gravely. "This is what I wass going to tell you. The money that your aunt left, that is yours, every penny of it—oh yes, every penny and every farthing of it is yours, sure enough. For it wass Mr. Ingram hass told me all about it; and the old lady, she wanted him to take care of the money for Sheila; but what wass the good of the money to Sheila? My lass, she will hef plenty of money of her own; and I wanted to hef nothing to do with what Mr. Ingram said—but it wass all no use, and there iss the money now for you and for Sheila, every penny and every farthing of it."

Mackenzie ended by talking in an injured way, as if this business had seriously increased his troubles.

"But you know," Lavender said with amazement, "you know as well as I do that this money was definitely left to Ingram, and—you may believe me or not—I was precious glad of it when I heard it. Of course it would have been of more use to him if he had not been about to marry this American lady——"

"Oh, you hef heard that, then?" Mackenzie said.

"Mosenberg brought me the news. But are you quite sure about this affair? Don't you think this is merely a trick of Ingram's, to enable him to give the money to Sheila? That would be very like him. I know him of old."

"Well, I cannot help it if a man will tell lies," said Mackenzie. "But that is what he says is true. And he will not touch the money—indeed, he will hef plenty, as you say—but there it is for Sheila and you; and you will be able to build whatever house you like.

And if you wass thinking of having a bigger boat than the *Maighdean-mhara*——" the old man suggested.

Lavender jumped at that notion directly.

"What if we could get a yacht big enough to cruise anywhere in the summer months?" he said. "We might bring a party of people all the way from the Thames to Loch Roag, and cast anchor opposite Sheila's house. Fancy Ingram and his wife coming up like that in the autumn: and I know you could go over to Sir James and get us some shooting."

Mackenzie laughed grimly.

"We will see, we will see about that. I think there will be no great difficulty about getting a deer or two for you; and as for the salmon, there will be one or two left in the White Water—oh yes, we will hef a little shooting and a little fishing for any of your friends. And as for the boat, it will be ferry difficult to get a good big boat for such a purpose, without you wass planning and building one yourself; and that will be better, I think; for the yachts now-a-days they are all built for the racing, and you will hef a boat fifty tons, sixty tons, seventy tons, that hass no room in her below, but is nothing but a big heap of canvas and spars. But if you wass wanting a good, steady boat, with good cabins below for the leddies, and a good saloon that you could hef your dinner in all at once, then you will maybe come down with me to a shipbuilder I know in Glasgow—oh, he is a ferry good man—and we will see what can be done. There is a gentleman now in Dunoon—and they say he is a ferry great artist too—and he hass a schooner of sixty tons that I hef been in myself, and it wass just like a steamer below for the comfort of it. And when the boat is ready, I will get you ferry good sailors for her,

that will know every bit of the coast from Loch-Indaal to the Butt of Lewis, and I will see that they are ferry cheap for you, for I hef plenty of work for them in the winter. But I wass no saying yet," the old man added, "that you were right about coming to live in Borva. Stornoway is a good place to live in; and it is a fine harbour for repairs, if the boat was wanting repairs——"

"If she were, couldn't we send her round to Stornoway?"

"But the people in Stornoway—it iss the people in Stornoway," said Mackenzie, who was not going to give in without a grumble.

Well, they did not fix on a site for the house that afternoon. Sheila did not make her appearance. Lavender kept continually turning and looking over the long undulations of rock and moorland; and at length he said—

"Look here, Johnny, would you mind going on by yourselves? I think I shall walk back to the house."

"What is keeping that foolish girl?" her father said, impatiently. "It is something about the dinner, now, as if any one wass particular about a dinner in an island like this, where you can expect nothing. But at Stornoway—oh yes, they hef many things there."

"But I want you to come and dine with us on board the *Phœbe* to-night, sir," Johnny said. "It will be rather a lark, mind you; we make up a tight fit in that cabin. I wonder if Mrs. Lavender would venture; do you think she would, sir?"

"Oh no, not this evening, any way," said her father, "for I know she will expect you all to be up at the house this evening; and what would be the use of

tumbling about in the bay when you can be in a house. But it is ferry kind of you—oh yes, to-morrow night, then we will go down to the boat—but this night, I know Sheila will be ferry sorry if you do not come to the house."

"Well, let's go back now," Johnny said, "and if we've time, we might go down for our guns and have a try along the shore for an hour or so before the daylight goes. Fancy that chance at those wild duck!"

"Oh, but that is nothing," Mackenzie said, "to-morrow you will come with me up to the loch, and there you will hef some shooting: and in many other places I will show you, you will hef plenty of shooting."

They had just got back to the house when they found Sheila coming out. She had, as her father supposed, been detained by her preparations for entertaining their guests; but now she was free until dinner-time, and so the whole party went down to the shore to pay a visit to the *Phœbe*, and let Mackenzie have a look at the guns on board. Then they went up to the house, and found the tall and grim keeper with the baby in his arms, while Scarlett and Mairi were putting the finishing touches on the gleaming white table and its show of steel and crystal.

How strange it was to Sheila to sit at dinner there, and listen to her husband talking of boating and fishing and what not as he used to sit and talk in the olden time to her father, on the summer evenings, on the high rocks over Borvabost. The interval between that time and this seemed to go clean out of her mind. And yet there must have been some interval, for he was looking older, and sterner, and much rougher about the face now, after being buffetted about by wind and rain and sun during that long and solitary

stay in Jura. But it was very like the old times when they went into the little drawing-room, and when Mairi brought in the hot water, and the whisky, the tobacco and the long pipes; when the old King of Borva sate himself down in his great chair by the table, and when Lavender came to Sheila, and asked her if he would get out her music, and open the piano for her.

"Madame," young Mosenberg said to her, "it is a long time since I heard one of your strange Gaelic songs."

"Perhaps you never heard this one," Sheila said, and she began to sing the plaintive "Farewell to Glenshalloch." Many a time, indeed, of late had she sung its simple and pathetic air as a sort of lullaby, perhaps because it was gentle, monotonous, and melancholy, perhaps because there were lines here and there that she liked. Many a time had she sung—

Sleep sound, my sweet babe, there is nought to alarm thee,
The sons of the valley no power have to harm thee!
I'll sing thee to rest in the balloch untrodden,
With a coronach sad for the slain of Culloden.

But long before she had reached the end of it her father's patience gave way, and he said—

"Sheila, we will hef no more of those teffles of songs! We will hef a good song; and there is more than one of the gentlemen can sing a good song, and we do not wish to be always crying over the sorrows of other people. Now be a good lass, Sheila, and sing us a good cheerful song."

And Sheila, with great good-nature, suddenly struck a different key, and sang, with a spirit that delighted the old man—

The standard on the braes o' Mar,
Is up and streaming rarely!
The gathering pipe on Lochnagar,
Is sounding lang and clearly!

The Highlandmen, from hill and glen,
In martial hue, with bonnets blue,
Wi' belted plaids, and burnished blades,
Are coming late and early!

"Now that is a better kind of song—that is a teffle of a good song!" Mackenzie cried, keeping time to the music with his right foot, as if he were a piper playing in front of his regiment. "Wass there anything like that in your country, Mr. Mosenberg?"

"I don't know, sir," said the lad, meekly; "but if you like I will sing you one or two of our soldiers' songs. They have plenty of fire in them, I think."

Certainly, Mackenzie had plenty of brilliant, and cheerful, and stirring music that evening, but that which pleased him most, doubtless, was to see—as all the world could see—the happiness of his good lass. Sheila, proud and glad, with a light on her face that had not been there for many a day, wanted to do everything at once to please and amuse her guests, and most of all to wait upon her husband; and Lavender was so abashed by her sweet service and her simple ways that he could show his gratitude only by some furtive and kindly touch of the hand as Sheila passed. It seemed to him she had never looked so beautiful; and never, indeed, since they left Stornoway together, had he heard her quiet low laugh so full of enjoyment. What had he done, he asked himself, to deserve her confidence; for it was the hope in her proud and gentle eyes that gave that radiant brightness to her face? He did not know. He could not answer. Perhaps the forgiveness she had so freely and frankly tendered, and the confidence she now so clearly showed in him sprang from no judgment or argument, but were only the natural fruit of an abounding and generous love. More than once that night he wished

that Sheila could read the next half-dozen years as though in some prophetic scroll, that he might show her how he would endeavour to prove himself if not worthy—for he could scarcely hope that—at least conscious of her great and unselfish affection, and as grateful for it as a man could be.

They pushed their enjoyment to such a late hour of the night that when they discovered what time it was, Mackenzie would not allow one of them to venture out into the dark to find the path down to the yacht; and Duncan and Scarlett were forthwith called on to provide the belated guests with some more or less haphazard sleeping accommodation.

"Mr. Mackenzie," said Johnny, "I don't mind a bit if I sleep on the floor. I've just had the jolliest night I ever spent in my life. Mosenberg, you'll have to take the *Phœbe* back to Greenock by yourself. I shall never leave Borva any more."

"You will be sober in the morning, Mr. Eyre," young Mosenberg said; but the remark was unjust, for Johnny's enthusiasm had not been produced by the old King's whisky, potent as that was.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Princess Sheila.

"I SHOULD like," said Mrs. Edward Ingram, sitting down and contentedly folding her hands in her lap, "I should so much like, Edward, to have my own way for once—it would be so novel and so nice."

Her husband was busy with a whole lot of plans all stretched out before him, and with a pipe which he had some difficulty in keeping alight. He did not even turn round as he answered—

"You have your own way always. But you can't expect to have mine also, you know."

"Do you remember," she said, slowly, "anything your friend Sheila told you about your rudeness to people? I wish, Edward, you would leave those ragged children and their school-houses for three minutes. Do! I so much want to see some places when we go to Scotland; for who knows when we may be there again? I have set my heart on the Braes of Yarrow. And Loch Awe by moonlight. And the Pass of Glencoe——"

"My dear child," he said, at last turning round in his chair, "how can we go to those places? Sheila says Oban on the fifteenth."

"But what Sheila says isn't an Act of Parliament," said the young American lady, plaintively and patiently. "Why should you regulate all your movements by her? You are always looking to the north—you are like the spires of the churches that are said to be always telling us that heaven is close by the Pole Star."

"The information is inaccurate, my dear," Ingram said, looking at his pipe, "for the spires of the churches on the other side of the world point the other way. However, that does not matter. How do you propose rampaging all over Scotland, and still be at Oban on the fifteenth?"

"Telegraph to Mr. and Mrs. Lavender to come on to Edinburgh, and leave the trip to Lewis until we have seen those places. For once we have got to that wild island, who knows when we shall return? Now do, like a good boy. You know this new house of theirs will be all the drier in a month's time. And their yacht will be all the more ship-shape. And both Sheila and

her husband will be the better of coming down among civilized folks for a few weeks' time—especially just now, when numbers of their friends must be in the Highlands—and of course you get better attention at the hotels when the season is going on, and they have every preparation made—and I am told the heather and fern on the hills look very fine in August—and I am sure Mr. and Mrs. Lavender will enjoy it very much, if we get a carriage somewhere and leave the railways altogether, and drive by ourselves all through the prettiest districts."

She wished to see the effect of her eloquence on him. It was peculiar. He put his pipe down and gravely repeated these lines, with which she was abundantly familiar—

"Sez Vather to I, 'Jack, rin arter him du!'
Sez I to Vather, 'I'm darned if I du!'"

"You won't?" she said.

"The proposal comes too late. How can you expect Sheila to leave her new house, and that boy of hers that occupies three-fourths of her letters, just at this time? I think it was very kind of her, mind you, to come away down to Oban to meet us; and Lavender too, is giving up the time out of the best working-season of the year. Bless you, you will see far more beautiful things as we go from Oban to Lewis than any you have mentioned. For we shall probably cut down by Scarba and Jura before going up to Skye; and then you will see the coast that you admired so much in Lavender's pictures."

"Is the yacht a large one, Edward?" his wife asked, somewhat timidly.

"Oh, big enough to take our party, a dozen times over."

"Will she tumble about much, do you think?"

"I don't know," Ingram said, with an unkindly grin. "But as you are a weak vessel, Lavender will watch the weather for you, and give it you as smooth as possible. Besides, look at the cleanliness and comfort of a smart yacht! You are thinking of one of those Channel steamers, with their engines and oil."

"Let us hope for the best," said his wife, with a sigh.

They not only hoped for it, but got it. When they left the Crinan and got on board the big steamer that was to take them up to Oban, all around them lay a sea of soft and shining blue, scarcely marred by a ripple. Here and there sharp crags that rose out of the luminous plain seemed almost black; but the farther islands lay soft and hazy in the heat, with the beautiful colours of August tinting the great masses of rock. As they steamed northward through the shining sea, new islands and new channels appeared until they came in sight of the open Atlantic, and that, too, was as calm and as still as a summer night. There was no white cloud in the blue vault of the sky; there was no crisp curl of a wave on the blue plain of the sea; but everywhere a clear, radiant, salt-smelling atmosphere, the drowsy haze of which was only visible when you looked at the distant islands, and saw the fine and pearly veil of heat that was drawn over the soft colours of the hills. The sea-birds dipped and disappeared as the big boat churned its way onward. A white solan, far away by the shores of Mull, struck the water as he dived and sent a jet of spray into the air. Colonsay and Oronsay became as faint clouds on the southern horizon; the jagged coast of Lorne drew near. And then they went up through the Sound of Kerrara, and steamed into the broad

and beautiful bay of Oban, and behold! here was Sheila on the pier, already waving a handkerchief to them, while her husband held her arm, lest in her excitement she should go too near the edge of the quay.

"And where is the boat that we have heard so much of?" said Mrs. Kavanagh, when all the kissing and hand-shaking was over.

"There!" said Sheila, not without some shame-faced pride, pointing to a shapely schooner that lay out in the bay, with her white decks and tall spars shining in the afternoon sun.

"And what do you call her?" asked Mrs. Kavanagh's daughter.

"We call her *Princess Sheila*," said Lavender. "What do you think of the name?"

"You couldn't have got a better," Ingram said, sententiously, and interposing as if it was not within his wife's province to form an opinion of any sort. "And where is your father, Sheila? In Borva?"

"Oh no, he is here," the girl said, with a smile. "But the truth is, he has driven away to see some gentlemen he knows, to ask if he can have some grouse for you. He should have been back by this time."

"I would not hurry him, Sheila," Ingram said, gravely. "He could not have gone on a more admirable errand. We must await his return with composure. In the meantime, Lavender, do make your fellows stop that man: he is taking away my wife's trunk to some hotel or other."

The business of getting the luggage on board the yacht was entrusted to a couple of men whom Lavender left on shore; whereupon the newly-arrived travellers put off in a little pinnace and were conveyed to the side of the handsome schooner. When

they were on board, an eager exploration followed; and if Sheila could only have undertaken to vouch for the smoothness of the weather for the next month, Mrs. Ingram was ready to declare that at last she had discovered the most charming, and beautiful, and picturesque fashion of living known to civilized man. She was delighted with the little elegancies of the state-rooms; she was delighted with the paintings on the under skylights, which had been done by Lavender's own hand; she was delighted with the whiteness of the decks and the height of the tapering spars; and she had no words for her admiration of the beautiful sweep of the bay, the striking ruins of the old castle at the point, the rugged hills rising behind the white houses, and out there in the west, the noble panorama of mountain, and island, and sea.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Ingram," Lavender said, "you will have cause to know Oban before we leave it. There is not a breath of wind to take us out of the bay."

"I am content," she said, with a gracious calm.

"But we must get you up to Borva somehow. There it would not matter how long you were becalmed; for there is plenty to see about the island. But this is a trifle commonplace, you know."

"I don't think so at all. I am delighted with the place," she said. "And so are you, Edward."

Ingram laughed. He knew she was daring him to contradict her. He proposed he should go ashore and buy a few lines with which they might fish for young saithe or lythe over the side of the yacht; but this project was stopped by the appearance of the King of Borva, who bore triumphant proof of the success of his mission in a brace of grouse held up in

each hand as a small boat brought him out to the yacht.

"And I was seeing Mr. Hutcheson," Mackenzie said to Lavender, as he stepped on board, "and he is a ferry good-natured man whatever, and he says if there is no wind at all he will let one of his steamers take the yacht up to Loch Sunart, and if there is a breeze at all we will get it there."

"But why should we go in quest of a breeze?" Mrs. Ingram said, petulantly.

"Why, mem," said Mackenzie, taking the matter seriously, "you wass not thinking we could sail a boat without wind? But I am not sure that there will not be a breeze before night."

Mackenzie was right. As the evening wore on, and the sun drooped in the west, the aspect of affairs changed somewhat, and there was now and again a sort of shiver apparent on the surface of the lake-like bay. When, indeed, the people on board came up on deck just before dinner, they found a rather thunderous-looking sunset spreading over the sky. Into the clear saffron glory of the western sky some dark and massive purple clouds had risen. The mountains of Mull had grown light and milk-like; and yet they seemed near. The glass-like bay began to move; and the black shadow of a ship that lay on the gleaming yellow plain began to tremble, as the water cut lines of light across the reflection of the masts. You could hear voices afar off. Under the ruins of the castle, and along the curves of the coast, the shadows of the water were a pure green; and the rocks were growing still more sharp and distinct in the gathering dusk. There was a cold smell of the sea in the air. And then swiftly the pale colours of the west waxed lurid and fierce;

the mountains became of a glowing purple; and then all the plain of the sea was dashed with a wild glare of crimson, while the walls of Dunolly grew black, and overhead the first scouts of the marshalling forces of the clouds came up in flying shreds of gold and fire.

"Oh aye, we may hef a breeze the night," Mackenzie said.

"I hope we sha'n't have a storm," Mrs. Ingram said.

"A storm? Oh no, no storm at all. It will be a ferry good thing if the wind lasts till the morning."

Mackenzie was not at all sure that there would be storm enough; and went down to dinner with the others rather grumbling over the fineness of the weather. Indeed, when they came on deck again, later on in the night, even the slight breeze that he had hoped for seemed impossible. The night was perfectly still. A few stars had come out overhead, and their light scarcely trembled on the smooth waters of the bay. A cold, fresh scent of seaweed was about, but no wind. The orange lights in Oban burned pale and clear; the red and green lamps of the steamers and yachts in the bay did not move. And when Mrs. Ingram came up to take Sheila forward to the bow of the boat, to sit down there, and have a confidential talk with her, a clear and golden moon was rising over the sharp black ridge of Kerrara into the still and beautiful skies, and there was not a ripple of the water along the sides of the yacht to break the wonderful silence of the night.

"My dear," she said, "you have a beautiful place to live in."

"But we do not live here," Sheila said, with a smile. "This is to me as far away from home as England can be to you, when you think of America.

When I came here the first time I thought I had got into another world, and that I should never be able to get back again to the Lewis."

"And is the island you live in more beautiful than this place?" she asked, looking round on the calm sea, the lambent skies, and the far mountains beyond, which were grey and ghostlike in the pale glow of the moon.

"If you see our island on such a night as this, you will say it is the most beautiful place in the world. It is the winter-time that is bad, when we have rain and mist for weeks together. But after this year I think we shall spend all the winters in London; although my husband does not like to give up the shooting and the boating, and that is very good amusement for him when he is tired with his work."

"That island life certainly seems to agree with him," said Mrs. Ingram, not daring even to hint that there was any further improvement in Sheila's husband than that of mere health; "I have never seen him look so well and strong. I scarcely recognized him on the pier—he was so brown and—and I think his sailor-clothes suit him so well. They are a little rough you know—indeed, I have been wondering whether you made them yourself."

Sheila laughed.

"I have seen you look at them. No, I did not make them. But the cloth, that was made on the island, and it is very good cloth whatever."

"You see what a bad imitation of your costume I am compelled to wear. Edward would have it, you know. I think he'd like me to speak like you, if I could manage it."

"Oh no, I am sure he would not like that," Sheila

said, "for many a time he used to correct me, and when he first came to the island I was very much ashamed, and sometimes angry with him——"

"But I suppose you got accustomed to his putting everybody right?" said Mr. Ingram's wife, with a smile.

"He was always a very good friend to me," Sheila said, simply.

"Yes, and I think he is now," said her companion, taking the girl's hand, and forcing herself to say something of that which lay at her heart, and which had been struggling for utterance during all this beating about the bush. "I am sure you could not have a better friend than he is, and if you only knew how pleased we both are to find you so well—and so happy——"

Sheila saw the great embarrassment in her companion's face, and she knew the good feeling that had driven her to this stammering confession.

"It is very kind of you," Sheila said, gently. "I am very happy—yes—I do not think I have anything more to wish for in the world."

There was no embarrassment in her manner as she made this simple avowal; her face was clear and calm in the moonlight, and her eyes were looking somewhat distantly at the sea and the island near. Her husband came forward with a light shawl, and put it round her shoulders. She took his hand, and for a moment pressed it to her lips. Then he went back to where Ingram and old Mackenzie were smoking; and the two women were left to their confidences. Mrs. Kavanagh had gone below.

What was this great noise next morning, of the rattling of chains and the flapping of canvas overhead? There was a slight motion in the boat and a plashing of

water around her sides. Was the *Princess Sheila* getting under weigh?

The various noises ceased; so also did the rolling of the vessel, and apparently all was silent and motionless again. But when the ladies had dressed, and got upon deck, behold they were in a new world! All around them were the blue waters of Loch Linnhe, lit up by the brilliant sunshine of the morning. A light breeze was just filling the great white sails; and the yacht, heeling over slightly, was cutting her placid way through the lapping waves. How keen was the fresh smell of the air! Sea-gulls were swooping down and around the tall masts: over there the green island of Lismore lay bright in the sunshine; the lonely hills of Morven and the mountains of Mull had a thousand shades of colour glowing on their massive shoulders and slopes; the ruins of Duart Castle, out at the point, seemed too fair and picturesque to be associated with dark legends of blood. Were these faint specks in the south the far islands of Colonsay and Oronsay? Lavender brought his glass to Mrs. Ingram, and, with many apologies to all the ladies for having woke them up so soon, bade her watch the flight of two herons making in for the mouth of Loch Etive.

They had postponed for the present that southward trip to Jura. The glass was still rising; and the appearance of the weather rendered it doubtful whether they might have wind enough to make such a cruise anything but tedious. They had taken advantage of this light breeze in the morning to weigh anchor and stand across for the Sound of Mull; if it held out, they would at least reach Tobermony, and take their last

look at a town before rounding Ardnamurchan and making for the wild solitudes of Skye.

"Well, Cis," Ingram said to his wife, as he busied himself with a certain long fishing line, "what do you think of the Western Highlands?"

"Why did you not tell me of these places before?" she said, rather absently; for the mere height of the mountains along the Sound of Mull—the soft green woods leading up to the great bare shoulders of purple, and grey, and brown above—seemed to draw away one's eyes and thoughts from surrounding objects.

"I have, often. But what is the use of telling?"

"It is the most wonderful place I have ever seen," she said. "It is so beautiful and so desolate at the same time. What lovely colours there are everywhere, on the sea, and on the shores there, and up the hills; and everything is so bright and gleaming. But no one seems to live here. I suppose you couldn't. The loneliness of the mountains and the sea would kill you."

"My dear child, these are town-bred fancies," he said, in his usual calm and carelessly sententious manner; "if you lived there, you would have plenty to do besides looking at the hills and the sea. You would be glad of a fine day to let you go out and get some fish, or go up the hills and get some blackcock for your dinner; and you would not get sad by looking at fine colours, as town-folks do. Do you think Lavender and Sheila spend their time in mooning up in that island of theirs?—and that, I can tell you, is a trifle more remote and wild than this is. They've got their work to do; and when that is done they feel comfortable and secure in a well-built house, and fairly pleased with themselves that they have earned some rest and amusement. I daresay, if you built a

cottage over there, and did nothing but look at the sea and the hills, and the sky at night, you would very soon drown yourself. I suppose if a man were to give himself up for three months to thinking of the first formation of the world, and the condition of affairs before that happened, and the puzzle about how the materials ever came to be there, he would grow mad. But few people luckily have the chance of trying. They've got their bread to earn; if they haven't, they're bent on killing something or other—foxes, grouse, deer, and what not—and they don't bother about the stars, or what lies just outside the region of the stars. When I find myself getting miserable about the size of a mountain, or the question as to how and when it came there, I know that it is time to eat something. I think breakfast is ready, Cis. Do you think you have nerve to cut this hook out of my finger? and then we can go below."

She gave a little scream, and started up. Two drops of blood had fallen on Lavender's white decks.

"No, I see you can't," he said. "Open this knife, and I will dig it out myself. Bless the girl, are you going to faint because I have scratched my finger?"

Lavender, however, had to be called in to help; and, while the surgical operation was going forward, Mrs. Ingram said—

"You see we have got town's-folks' hands as yet. I suppose they will get to be leather by and by. I am sure I don't know how Mrs. Lavender can do those things about a boat with the tiny little hands she has."

"Yes, Sheila has small hands, hasn't she?" Lavender said, as he bound up his friend's finger, "but then she makes up for that by the bigness of heart."

It was a pretty and kindly speech, and it pleased

Mrs. Ingram, though Sheila did not hear it. Then, when the doctoring was over, they all went below for breakfast, and an odour of fish, and ham, and eggs, and coffee, prevailed throughout the yacht.

"I have quite fallen in love with this manner of life," Mrs. Ingram said. "But, tell me, is it always as pleasant as this? Do you always have those blue seas around you, and green shores? Are the sails always white in the sunlight?"

There was a dead silence.

"Well, I would not say," Mackenzie observed, seriously, as no one else would take up the question; "I would not say it is always ferry good weather off this coast—oh no, I would not say that; for if there wass no rain, what would the cattle do, and the streams? —they would not hef a pool left in them. Oh yes, there is rain sometimes; but you cannot always be sailing about, and when there will be rain, you will hef your things to attend to indoors. And there is always plenty of good weather if you wass wanting to tek a trip round the islands, or down to Oban—oh yes, there is no fear of that; and it will be a ferry good coast whatever for the harbour, and there is always some place you can put into, if it wass coming on rough, only you must know the coast, and the lie of the islands, and the rocks about the harbours. And you would learn it very soon. There is Sheila there; there is no one in the Lewis will know more of the channels in Loch Roag than she does—not one, I can say that; and when you go further away, then you must tek some one with you who wass well acquaint with the coast. If you wass thinking of having a yacht, Mr. Ingram, there is one I hef heard of just now in

Rothesay that is for sale, and she is a ferry good boat, but not so big as this one——"

"I think we'll wait till my wife knows more about it, Mr. Mackenzie," Ingram said. "Wait till she gets round Ardnamurchan, and has crossed the Minch, and has got the final Atlantic swell as you run in to Borvabost."

"Edward, you frighten me," his wife said; "I was beginning to give myself courage."

"But it is mere nonsense!" cried Mackenzie, impatiently. "Kott pless me! There is no chance of your being ill in this fine weather; and if you had a boat of your own, you would ferry soon get accustomed to the weather—oh, ferry soon indeed—and you would hef no more fear of the water than Sheila has."

"Sheila has far too little fear of the water," her husband said.

"Indeed, and that is true," said her father; "and it is not right that a young lass should go about by herself in a boat——"

"But you know very well, papa, that I never do that now."

"Oh, you do not do it now," grumbled Mackenzie. "No, you do not do it now. But some day you will forget, when there is something to be done, and you will run a great danger, Sheila."

"But she has promised never to go out by herself; haven't you, Sheila?" her husband said.

"I did. I promised that to you. And I have never been out since by myself."

"Well, don't forget, Sheila," said her father, not very sure but that some sudden occasion might tempt the girl to her old deeds of recklessness.

The two American ladies had little to fear. The Hebrides received them with fair sunshine and smooth

seas; and all the day long their occupation was but to watch the wild birds flying from island to island, and mark the gliding by of the beautiful coasts, and listen to the light rushing of the waves as the fresh sea-breeze flew through the rigging. And Sheila was proud to teach them something of the mystery of sailing a small craft, and would give them the tiller sometimes, while her eye, as clear and keen as her father's, kept watch and ward over the shapely vessel that was making for the northern seas. One evening she said to her friends—

"Do you see that point that runs out on this side of the small islands? Round that we enter Loch Roag."

The last pale light of the sun was shining along the houses of Borvabost as the *Princess Sheila* passed. The people there had made out the yacht long ere she came close to land; and Mackenzie knew that twenty eager scouts would fly to tell the news to Scarlett and Duncan, so that ample preparation would be made in the newly-finished house down by the sea. The wind, however, had almost died away; and they were a long time getting into Loch Roag in this clear twilight. They who were making their first visit to Sheila's island sat contentedly enough on deck, however, amazed and bewildered by the beauty of the scene around them. For now the sun had long sunk, but there was a glow all over the heavens, and only in the far east did the yellow stars begin to glimmer over the dark plain of the Loch. Mealasabhal, Suainabhal, Cracabhal, lifted their grand shoulders and peaks into this wondrous sky, and stood dark and clear there, with the silence of the sea around them. As the night came on the yellow stars grew more intense overhead, but the lambent glow in the north did not pale. They

entered a small bay. Up there on a plateau of the rocks stood a long, low house, with all its windows gleaming in the dusk. The pinnace was put off from the yacht; in the strange silence of the night the ripples plashed around her prow; her oars struck fire in the water as the men rowed in to the land. And then, as Sheila's guests made their way up to the house, and when they reached the verandah, and turned to look at the sea, and the Loch, and the far mountains opposite, they beheld the clear and golden sickle of the moon rising from behind the black outline of Suainabhal into the soft and violet skies. As the yellow moon rose in the south, a pathway of gold began to tremble on Loch Roag, and they could see the white curve of sand around the bay. The air was sweet with the cold smell of the sea. There was a murmur of the far Atlantic all around the silent coast.

It was the old familiar picture that had charmed the imagination of Sheila's first and only lover, when as yet she was to him as some fair and wonderful Princess, living in a lonely island, and clothed round about with the glamour of old legends and stories of the sea. Was she any longer this strange Sea-Princess, with dreams in her eyes, and the mystery of the night and the stars written in her beautiful face? Or was she to him now—what all the world had long ago perceived her to be—a tender wife, a faithful companion, and a true and loyal-hearted woman? Sheila walked quietly into the house; there was something for her friends to see; and, with a great pride, and a gentleness, and a gladness, Scarlett was despatched on a particular errand. The old King of Borva was still down at the yacht, looking after the landing of certain small articles of luggage. Duncan had come

forward to Ingram and said, "And are you ferry well, sir?" and Mairi, come down from Mackenzie's house, had done the same. Then there was a wild squeal of the pipes in the long apartment where supper was laid—the unearthly gathering-cry of a clan; until Sheila's husband dashed into the place and threatened to throw John into the sea if he did not hold his peace. John was offended, and would probably have gone up the hill-side, and, in revenge, played, "Mackrimmon shall no more return," only that he knew the irate old King of Borva would, in such a case, literally fulfil the threat that had been lightly uttered by his son-in-law. In another room, where two or three women were together, one of them suddenly took both Sheila's hands in hers, and said, with a look of kindness in her eyes—"My dear, I can believe now what you told me that night at Oban."

And Sheila's heart was too full to make answer.

THE END.

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